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IMAGINATION
SCIENCE FICTION

JUNE, 1958
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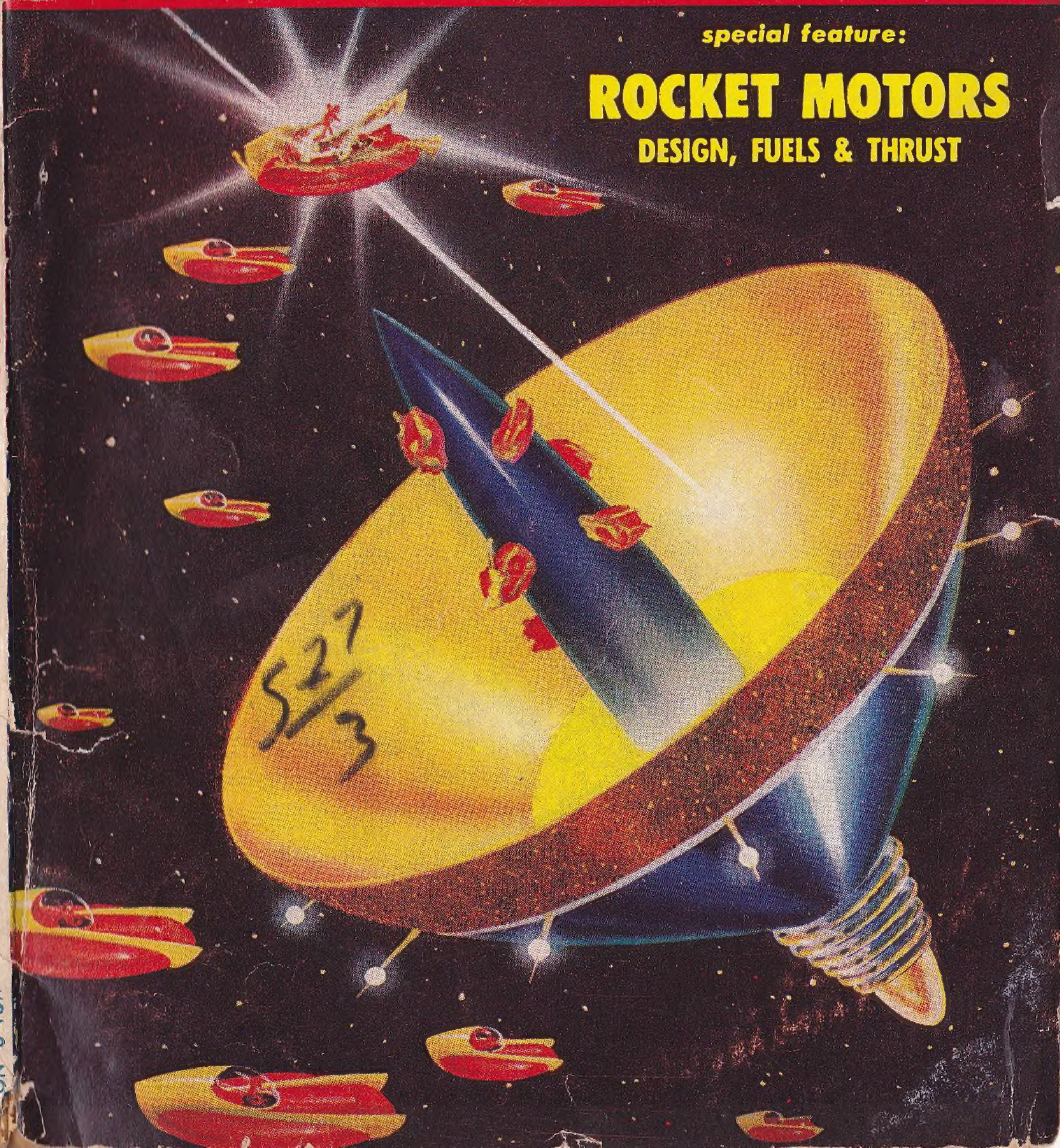
THE FRIENDLY *KILLERS*
by S. M. Tenneshaw

special feature:

ROCKET MOTORS
DESIGN, FUELS & THRUST



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JUNE, 1958 IMAGINATION SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 9 NO. 3
ISSUE NO. 61

"I call it a bad day if I don't make $25 before noon"

(This chair alone brought $4.50 with twenty-five minutes work and 32¢ in cleaning materials.)

by Harold Holmes

"Just a few months ago I made the big move. I gave up my job and started spending all my time in the little business I had been running on the side. It wasn't an easy decision, but, now I'm tickled to death I made it. Not just because I'm my own boss or because I have an excellent chance of making over $10,000 this year. It goes deeper than that.

"You see, this idea has caught on like wildfire in my town. Not a day goes by without my phone ringing with women calling for appointments. The beauty of it is that once a woman becomes my customer, she calls back year after year. Not only that, she tells her friends, too, and they call me. Before I know it I'm swamped with work. (And at $7.50 an hour net profit it doesn't take long before my bank account is really mushrooming.)

"Funny thing, but back last year, before I started, I never realized the money there was in this business waiting for someone to come along and collect it. Just think: every house in town has furniture and most have rugs or carpeting. I concentrate on just the better homes and have more work than I can handle. You know why? Because women are fussy about their furnishings. Can't stand to see them dirty. That's why they call me over every year.

"The average job is worth $25.00 to me and takes a little over 2 hours. Out of this, after paying for materials, advertising and other expenses I net about $15.00 clear profit. This means I need just 3 jobs a day to clear $11,250.00 in a year. Frankly, since this will be my first full-time year I'll be glad to hit the $10,000 mark. But after that this business should grow larger each year until I have to hire men to help me handle the business.

Personally Trained by Another Dealer

"Believe me there's nothing magic about it. I didn't know a thing about cleaning and mothproofing before I became a Duraclean dealer. But after my application was accepted I was trained right here in town by a successful dealer from another city. I was astonished by the short time it took me to become an expert. Actually, much of the credit must go to the Duraclean process, which is so safe it has earned the Parents' Magazine Seal.

"The portable machine you see is just one of the electrical machines I use. It manufactures a light aerated foam with a peculiar action chemists call 'peptizing'. It means that instead of being scrubbed deep into the fabric, dirt is gently ABSORBED by the foam, leaving the fabric clean all the way down. Women can't believe their eyes when they see how it works. Colors appear bright again, and rug pile unmats and rises like new. I don't have to soak rugs or upholstery to get them clean, which ends the problem of shrinkage, and means the furnishings can be used again the very same day. This alone has brought me a lot of customers.

"As a Duraclean dealer I make money with four other services, too: ***Duraproof*** . . which makes furnishings immune to moth and carpet beetle damage (it's backed by a six year warranty). ***Durashield,*** a brand new dirt-delaying treatment. It coats fabrics with an invisible film that keeps dirt out. ***Duraguard,*** another new service, flameproofs draperies, upholstery and carpets to reduce charring and the tendency of fires to flame up. And ***Spotcraft,*** which consists of special chemical products for removing stubborn spots and stains. On jobs where I perform all five services, I multiply profits!

"One of the nicest things about being a Duraclean dealer is that I get continuous help from Duraclean Headquarters. My services are nationally-advertised in famous magazines like McCall's, House Beautiful and many others. I also get a complete advertising kit prepared by experts. (There's even a musical commercial!) I get a monthly magazine full of methods to build business and I can meet with other dealers at Duraclean conventions. I'm also backed by insurance. In fact there are over 25 regular services I get under their unique System.

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"Maybe you too would like to break away from your job and make a fresh start in a business of your own. Do you need a shop? Certainly not. I operate from home. Need a lot of money to start? Not at all. Duraclean finances reliable men, after a moderate down payment, and furnishes enough supplies to return your TOTAL investment.

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Front cover painting by Malcolm Smith.

Published bi-monthly by Greenleaf Publishing Company, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois. William L. Hamling, President; Frances Hamling, Secretary-Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Address all communications to IMAGINATION, P.O. Box 230, Evanston, Illinois. We do not accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or art work; submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed return envelopes. Accepted material is subject to whatever revision is necessary to meet requirements, and will be paid for at our current rates. The names of all characters used in stories are fictitious; any resemblance to any person living or dead is coincidental. Copyright 1958 Greenleaf Publishing Company. Subscription rate $3.00 12 issues. Advertising rates sent upon request. Printed in U.S.A. by Stephens Printing Corp., Sandusky, Ohio.

The Editorial

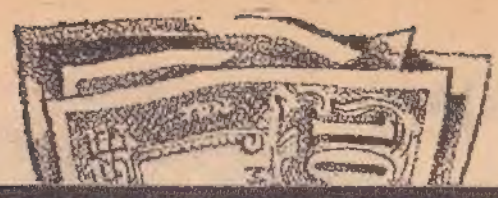
Trips to the Moon are apt to be quite unsensational in the immediate future compared to some technological advances. Like one we heard about the other day. Seems that some manufacturer predicts it won't be long before we can discard the entire clothing industry in favor of "painted on garments". As we understand it chemistry is on the threshold of producing a substance (call it plasticlike for want of a better description) which will allow a person to actually have clothes painted on his spanking bare body. He can choose whatever design and color to stimulate garments he desires. What's more, we'll probably have new walk-in booths where you can change your clothes several times a day to meet social requirements. And the whole shebang will be nothing more than a fast paint job.

As we further understand it this innovation will be weather-proof and can be controlled for winter or summer temperatures. You're always warm, or cool, depending. But while all this is certainly spectacular and we applaud the research which may eventually accomplish this feat, we do wonder who's going to change the mores and folkways of our society to accomodate this "transparent" attire. We can, of course, see great advantages from the male point of view. But unless modesty will become a lost word overnight, we see great antagonism to the idea regardless of the scientific merits. Ah, well, it's a pleasant thought, anyway.

With the above as an example of our rapidly changing world, we wonder if indeed much will remain fiction ere the century expires. The way we're going now brings to mind the old s-f plot of the first interstellar voyage. A space drive is perfected which will carry a ship (and its one-man crew) to the nearest star in some thirty or forty Earth years of time. The intrepid pioneer embarks into the vast reaches of outer space and some forty years later reaches a planet of the star and discovers a thriving Earth colony. The poor bazoo finds out that just a few years previous scientists on Earth discovered a *sub*-space drive which allowed men to make the interstellar trip in a couple of weeks. So after a few decades of traveling the pioneer finds out he's literally tossed his own life-span out into a vacuum.

We'll have to come up with some special medals for those first explorers. Just in case their triumph turns out to be hollow. Like painted-on clothes. You can't believe everything you see. . .wlh

ARE YOU JUST "GETTING BY" WHILE OTHER MEN MAKE



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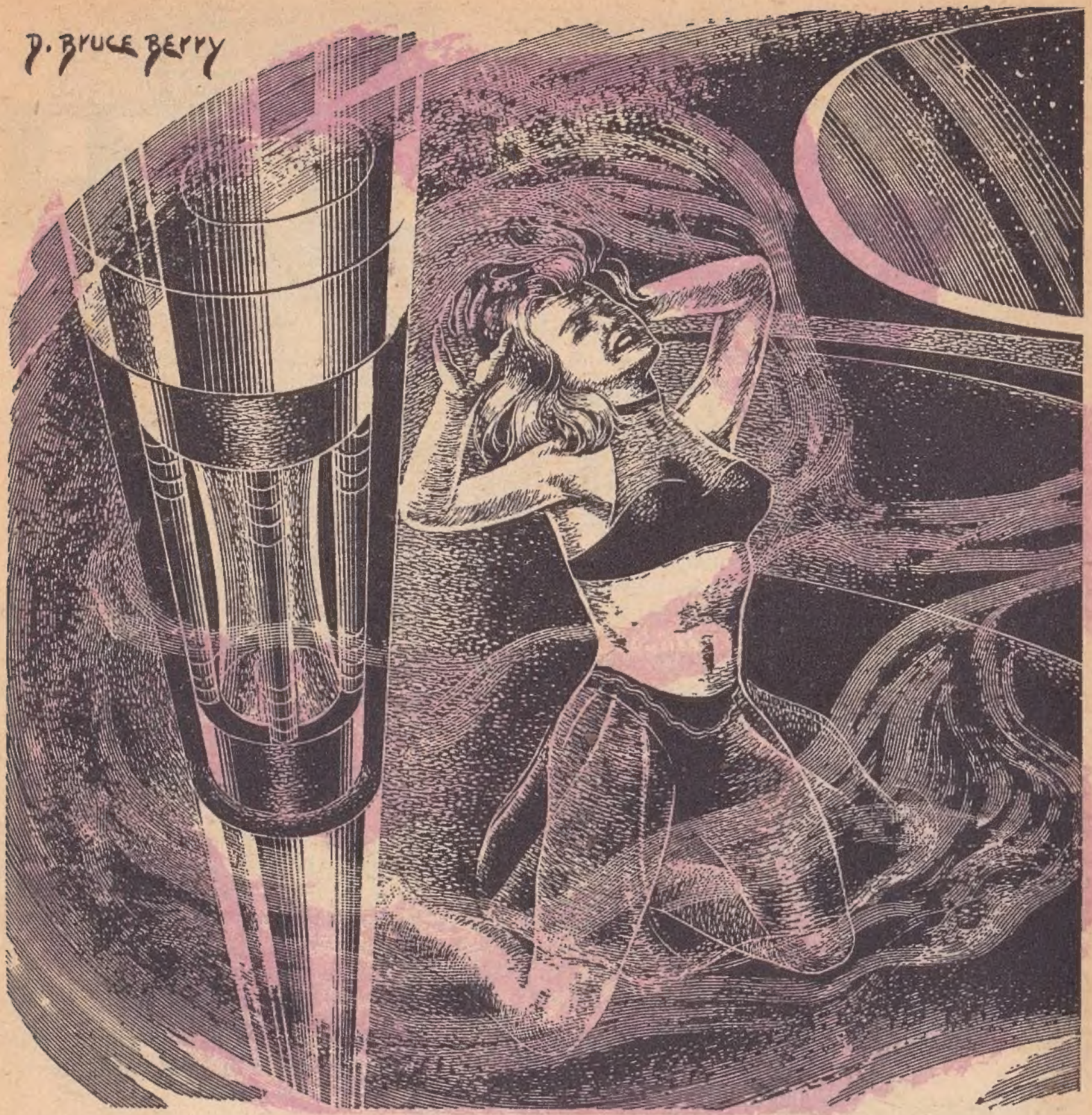


The Friendly Killers

by

S. M. Tenneshaw

How do you fight an alien race invisible to Terran eyes? Particularly when you suspect your enemy is really masquerading as an ally!

"MANKIND NEVER LEARNed where the Kel came from. They were, apparently, a remnant of some uncontacted island culture.

"The first hint the FedGov had of their existence was the sudden appearance of their strange silver globeships off Cadar. Sweeping down with not even an effort to communicate with the helpless inhabitants, the Kel desolated the entire planet. Other outlying worlds met the same fate.

"Then the FedGov rallied. A rigid defense net was set up, and the controversial compulsory conditioning laws enacted.

"But since the Kel maintained

no fixed base of operations, it seemed impossible to strike any really damaging blow against them.

"The result was a stalemate, in which neither side appeared able to gain any real advantage.

"This situation continued for well-nigh two hundred years, until a disastrous break-through in which the Kel wiped out the entire population of Bejak II.

"The next four years saw a whole series of renewed assaults on the human race. Interplanetary shipping was disrupted so badly that in many areas worlds were virtually without mutual contact save through the limited and highly restricted facilities of FedGov spacewarp.

"The final climax developed on the bastion world of Rizal, when it became apparent that in this struggle man was faced with enemies within. . ."

—Hedikawa, GALACTIC HISTORY

CHAPTER 1
THE LUCKY ONES

OUTSIDE the space-warp chamber, Rizal's great green sun had already set. Thick olive dusk eddied through the interplanetary transit center.

I swore under my breath and slammed shut the warp-hatch switch.

Locking bars whispered back. The hatch revolved on its axis, slow as an asteroid eroding. I threw another quick glance at my chrono.

It still read the same as before: six Earth hours more. . .six hours to ferret out the truth or be forever reconditioned.

—Six hours, that is, if Controller Alfred Kruze didn't cut it shorter.

And if he did, Rizal might very well change status. Today, it was billed as the FedGov's outermost bastion against the Kel. Tomorrow, it could prove man's fatal flaw, the Achilles heel in our whole system of defenses.

In which case—

Involuntarily, I shivered.

And still the hatch's cylinder moved at its same snail's pace.

Then, abruptly, there was a click of gears meshing. Tenons dovetailed. The hatch slid inward on its thick, girder-rigid tracks, back between the island banks of micromesh transistors.

Not waiting further, I squeezed between cylinder and slot and scrambled out into the night.

"Agent Traynor—?"

The voice came from the shadows. A dull, phlegmatic, tranquilized, conditioned voice. I stopped short; turned fast. "Who's asking?"

The man shrugged stolidly, not even picking up my tension. "I'm a port rep, Agent Traynor. Port rep second, that is—"

"So who told you to come out here? Who said you should meet me?"

"Oh. . ." A pause. "Well, you see, there's this sigman, Agent Traynor. Up in the Interworld Communications section. He had a regular 7-D clearance report that a FedGov Security investigation agent was warping in—you have to file a 7-D on all warpings, you know, Agent Traynor, on account of restrictives. So—well, the rep first was out to eat, so I just notified Rizal Security, just a routine report, and the unit controller there, an Agent Gaylord, he said for me to meet you, and—"

I bit down hard and shifted my weight, both at once, wondering if a broken jaw would interfere with the work of a port rep second.

Only then, all at once, I caught the unmistakable *whish* of a grav-car sweeping in.

The lights hit us almost in the same instant. Two seconds later a man who said he was Agent Gaylord was jumping down and locking wrists with me in Rizal's traditional greeting.

Even that wrist-lock set my teeth on edge. It was too solid, too stolid, too thorough a job of conditioning.

Or was it maybe, just a trifle over-done?

Thoughtfully, I studied Gaylord.

A tiny vein was twitching, up close to his hair-line. He seemed to have a tendency to nibble at his lower lip also. His nails—

We got into the grav-car. The routine began almost before we were off the ground: "Sorry I wasn't here to meet you, Traynor. But we didn't get a copy of your assignment order, or even of your warping clearance."

I shrugged. "I'm not surprised. The whole thing was pretty sudden."

"Oh?" Unit Controller Gaylord sounded as if he were trying to sound casual. "Just what is the 'whole thing', Traynor? Are you allowed to tell me about it?"

"Glad to, if you'll promise not to turn me in for a psych check." I made a business of chuckling with wry good humor. "As a matter of fact, I'm here to become the recipient of good fortune."

"The re— What—?" The grav-car rocked as Gaylord swung round, staring at me.

"The recipient of good fortune," I repeated. "Rizal's a lucky planet these days: that's the word. So I'm here to see if I can hook one of the prizes."

GAYLORD FACED front again—a trifle abruptly, it seemed. The grav-car speeded up.

I said. "They're clever gadgets, Gaylord. Have you picked up any more of them?"

My companion's face stayed expressionless as a mask. "Any more of what?"

I shrugged. "Thrill-mills, obviously."

"Thrill-mills—?"

I leaned back in my seat, full of the satisfaction that comes of drawing the right card. "A thrill-mill," I observed, assuming a mock-academic tone, "is a fantastically expensive little device known technically as a perceptual intensifier. It's given away, not bought or sold, and is found only on Rizal. No one knows where it comes from, or why. Neither is there any certainty as to its true purpose. But whether as primary function or by-product, it shatters the wall of tranquillity established by our Educational Psych Department's inhibitory conditioning program and supplies the user with sensory, emotional and intellectual experiences of his selection, also vividly communicated as to render his earlier, conditioned contacts with reality as flat and insipid as so many pale grey shadows."

No response from Gaylord. Banking not too steadily, he slowed the grav-car and, dropping down a hundred feet or so, eased it to a landing on a roof emblazoned with the FedGov Security insignia.

I waited till the little craft slid to a halt. Then, quite casually, I asked, "How about it, Gaylord? Do those gadgets really jolt you as hard as they say?"

My companion stopped short with the grav-car's door half open. His voice grew suddenly shriller than before. "What are you talking about? How would I know?"

"That's plain enough, isn't it? Obviously, you've used one."

For a taut second, Gaylord sat unmoving. Then, savagely, he snatched for the front of my tunic.

I didn't even draw back.

Gaylord's face seemed to sag. Breathing fast and shallow, he let go of me and began chewing at his lower lip.

Still pointedly casual, I smoothed my tunic. "Take a good look at yourself, Controller," I suggested. "How would you diagnose a man whose temper flares, in a world where temper can't exist? How would you judge someone who jumps and jerks and jitters under pressure?"

No response.

I leaned forward. "You know the answer, of course, as well as I do. When the thrill-mills began to come in, you thought you'd

experiment with one a little—try it out, see how it worked.

"Next thing you knew, your patterns were cracking. You found you couldn't stand the drabness of conditioned living. The world was too bright, too vivid; reality was just too wonderful to give up.

"So, instead of turning yourself in for reconditioning, you've tried to hide the truth and pretend to be just as dull and unresponsive as you were before. . ."

Gaylord's face had grown paler and paler as I talked. Now suddenly, he spun in his seat and tried to throw himself out the grav-car's open door.

I caught his shoulder; slammed him back. "Controller, I've got news for you! Run out on me now, and I'll see that Kruze has you blocked back to Drudge Third."

Gaylord stared at me for so long my arm was beginning to ache with the strain of holding him.

Finally, then, in a sullen voice, he said, "What do you want me to do?"

"That's better." I released his shoulder; gestured him out of the grav-car. "Let's go inside where we can talk."

The office we ended up in—Gaylord's own, I gathered—had two doors, a desk big enough to skate on, three chairs, psychostructor and reel-case, and a custom voco equipped with scanner and scriber.

As a matter of policy, of maintaining control on all levels, I left my host standing while I took the chair behind the desk.

For an instant his jaw tightened angrily. Then, dodging my eyes and turning quickly, he said, "I'll get the file-reels."

I stopped him midway to the door: "What file-reels, Gaylord?"

"Why, the ones on the thrill-mills, of course." Perplexity at the question drew his brows together as he said it.

"Why?"

"Why—?" Openly startled now, he groped. "Well, it's just—I mean, I thought—"

I SAID, "Let me tell you the story, Gaylord. Then you decide if we need the reels.

"Forty-three Rizal days ago, a man named Frederick Zubin got a voco call. It was from a woman—a beautiful woman he'd never seen before. She congratulated him on it being his sixty-first brithday, and said an anonymous well-wisher wanted to send him a little present.

"A messenger popped in almost before the woman hung up. He gave Zubin a package about the size of a pound box of candy. Unwrapped, it turned out to be a

metal case with a nameplate stamped 'Apex Perceptual Intensifier'. Another plate, on the back, said it was 'Model DXG'! Those were the only marks on it anywhere, inside or out. There weren't any instructions as to what it was supposed to do or how to use it.

"Zubin was curious, in his dull, lethargic, conditioned way. He fiddled with the switches and dials.

"Eventually the thing came on, of course. It practically sent him through the roof. Colors, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings—all his senses were sharpened so far beyond anything he'd ever known before that he thought at first he was going crazy.

"If Zubin had had his way, then, we'd probably never have known about his little present. But his wife, in the next room, caught the fringe effect. It wasn't strong enough to hook her, the way it had Zubin himself, but it did scare her half to death. She decided anything that potent must be immoral, or illegal, or both, so she called your office in a hurry.

"Your psych boys ran poor Zubin through all the tests, from A to Izzard. They couldn't find anything wrong with him, or any harm done, except for one key point: His conditioning had been shattered. From a dreary, phlegmatic lump of protoplasmic tranquility, he'd been transformed into a human being—the kind of eager, intense, raw-nerved, inconsistent, emotional human being we used to have back two hundred years ago, before the laws that made conditioning compulsory.

"That scared everybody. As unit controller for Rizal Security, you ordered a full-scale check.

"In ten days, your men turned up 736 duplicates of Zubin's gadget. The story on all of them was the same: A good-looking girl had vocoed, congratulated whoever it was on having a birthday or anniversary or promotion, and then sent up a thrill-mill.

"Beyond that, you didn't get far. It turned out there wasn't any Apex syndicate or cartel or work coadunate listed anywhere. No one had ever heard of any such device as a perceptual intensifier. The messengers who delivered the packages worked from voco calls themselves; they even made their pick-ups at robot sorter stations. And when you tried to track down the girl who'd done the calling, you found her face apparently belonged to a youngster named Celeste Stelpa who's been certified as dead ever since the Kel blasted Bejak II four years ago.

"As for the technical end of things, nine of your lab men lost their conditioning before they could

even get a thrill-mill apart. When they finally did tear one down successfully, they found it wasn't anything too remarkable, really—just a routine sort of gadget that regrouped standard circuits and miniquipment to produce interpulsational patterns of alpha and zeta waves. Effect-wise, that erases the synaptical threadings set up by Educational Psych's conditioning process, so that experiences come through sharp and clear, at maximum voltage, instead of dulled and blurred. It's a permanent change, too—though whether that's accidental or by design, we still don't know.

"Alpha-zeta erasure isn't anything new. It's been done in the psych labs for a hundred years or more.

"And that's where the only really interesting angle on all this comes in: In the labs, the job took a roomful of equipment. So to get the process down to thrill-mill size, whoever manufactured these Apex gadgets used special thronium condenser strata and variocouplers.

"That automatically pushes the cost per thrill-mill up to twice or three times what you'd ordinarily pay for a grav-car."

I got up, then, taking my time about it. . .letting the silence grow heavy while I came around the pond-sized desk and moved to a spot directly in front of Gaylord.

"Controller," I said softly, "who do you know who can afford to give away 737 thrill-mills at that kind of price?"

A shrugging, a shifting, more hostile than uneasy. "No one, I guess. At least, no one I've ever heard of." He still sounded sullen.

"That's right," I agreed. "No one. It would dent FedGov Security's confidential budget to bury an expense that big. Kruze himself couldn't handle it; not without a lot of doing."

Again, Gaylord shifted. But this time, nervous tension rather than belligerence was in the action. As earlier, perplexity furrowed his forehead.

I said, "Now you know why I'm not going to waste time scanning file-reels, Controller. The data we need's already in. Intelligent interpretation is the next step. — That, and" —I paused, ever so briefly— "working up the nerve to act."

FOR THE FIRST TIME, Gaylord's eyes came round to meet mine. "What do you mean?"

I shrugged, in my turn. "I mean, Security's gone at this all wrong, from Controller Kruze straight down to your lowest Rizalian subagent. Because one and all, you've been content just to back track on those thrill-mills."

Gaylord's frown deepened. "I don't see—"

"Nineteen of the people who've received those gadgets hold key positions in Rizal's defense against the Kel," I interrupted coldly. "One hundred ninety-one rank as military administrators. Forty-seven more can be classed as vital to supplementary services."

"You mean, you think this all is some sort of crazy Kel plot?" Controller Gaylord's brow smoothed as if by magic. A caustic note suddenly edged his voice. "Maybe you better check those file-reels after all, Traynor. They show 112 clerks in that group that got the thrill-mills. There also were 98 women engaged in motherhood, 226 tech grades, and 44 drudge grades."

"And that wouldn't strike you as protective camouflage, maybe?"

"Protective nonsense, you mean! All you're offering is a hair-brained theory, with neither facts nor logic to back it!"

He was as bad as Kruze.

I nodded slowly. "You may be right. However, I'm still willing to bet my record, my future, against yours on it."

"Your record—?" Gaylord stared. "What is this, anyhow? What are you talking about?" The furrows were back in his forehead.

"It's time to cut loose, that's all. We need action—real action, not just back-tracking." In spite of myself, anticipating, I smiled a little. "You've got a sigman on duty here somewhere, of course?"

"A sigman—?" Gaylord's furrows deepened. "Why, sure, of course."

"All right, then." I hooked my thumbs in my tunic-sash. "I want a message plated—an all-points, top-emergency, triple-restricted action order."

Utter incredulity came to the unit controller's eyes. He didn't move. He didn't speak.

"The message!" I repeated, more sharply. "Take it down. Right now."

Gaylord still didn't move.

"Would you rather I reported the fact and circumstances of your own de-conditioning direct to Controller Kruze instead?"

Another moment of silence, while the incredulity in Gaylord's eyes changed to sullen hate. Then, crossing to the voco, he flipped on the scriber unit. "All right. What's your message, rack you?"

For the fraction of a second I hesitated. My hands were suddenly cold, my lips stiff.

Then, drawing a deep breath, I spoke—slowly, distinctly:

"Attention all stations! This is Agent Mark Traynor speaking, under special authorization of Controller Alfred Kruze, FedGov In-

terplanetary Security Headquarters.

"You are hereby directed to place under close arrest within one Earth hour any and all persons who have had possession of or contact with the devices known as Apex Perceptual Intensifiers or, more commonly, thrill-mills.

"A list of such persons is appended to this order. Immediately following their arrest, they will be transported by fastest available carrier to the nearest port area and there delivered to the port director for prompt dispatch under guard to FedGov Interplanetary Security Headquarters.

"No exceptions to this order will be granted. Any station controller asking for such exception, or failing to apprehend and deliver all listed persons within his station's prescribed jurisdiction, will automatically be included in the shipment order.

"Immediate acknowledgment of this order will be given by all stations. . ."

CHAPTER II
PRESSURE PLAY

I LOCKED the door behind Gaylord. Then, crossing to the rack beside the psychostructor, I began hunting down city charts, transport and communications guides, specifications for the planet's anti-Kel defenses.

They added up to a neat pile of reels. Clamping electrodes to my temples, I turned on the psychostructor, slapped the first spool into place, and settled down to the tedium of waiting for the mechanism to hammer data into my brain.

In twenty minutes, the streets and alleys were my own. In forty, I knew my way through every observation post and satellite control board.

At fifty, the voco rang.

Numb with fatigue, I lurched up, tore off the clamps, and hurried to the scanner-speaker unit.

Blonde and lovely, a girl smiled up at me from the plate. "How do you do. May I speak with Agent Mark Traynor, please?"

"I'm Traynor."

"Oh! How nice! I was hoping I might catch you in." The girl's voice was warm and friendly. "You see, I want to congratulate you, Agent Traynor, on your new assignment to Rizal. We feel we have a lovely planet here; and of course we're proud of our position as the outermost bastion of the FedGov's defenses against the Kel. And since Security plays such a vital part in mankind's battle against these alien invaders, one of our citizens—he wishes to remain anonymous, so I can't tell you his name—has asked that you

accept a little present; a token of good-will from Rizal to you. A messenger will come in just a moment, and—"

I said, "Come off it, Celeste. This is me you're talking to—me, Mark Traynor. Remember? Remember?"

The girl in the scanner-plate broke off, lips still half-parted. Ever so slightly, the clear eyes changed expression.

"I know what happened on Bejak, Celeste." I smiled as I said it—a wise smile, I hoped, cool and confident. "I know because I was there, right to the last. So that means I know about you, too, and what's going on here. That's why I came to block you. And don't tell me that first wrench I threw into the works didn't hit hard—you wouldn't have called me if it hadn't! But that's just the beginning. Count on it, there's more to come! So you'd better break clear before I let go. Otherwise, you'll get the same as your Kel friends."

It was as if a shutter had closed behind the clear grey eyes. The girl's hands moved in small, uncertain gestures. "I—I don't know what you mean. I've never seen you before—"

"You haven't?" I made it a point to chuckle softly. "Have it your way, then. Though you certainly took a different view, that last night in the bunker.—By the way, did that cut heal all right? The skin below your throat was so soft, I was afraid it might scar—"

Celeste's lovely features seemed to stiffen. I couldn't be sure, though, because the scanner-plate went blank in the same instant.

Like an echo, someone began pounding on the door.

Cutting off the voco, I went over and unlocked the heavy portal.

A messenger was waiting with a thrill-mill for me.

I frowned. "How did you get in here? Does Rizal Security let strangers wander through its headquarters in the middle of the night?"

"I dunno." The messenger shrugged stupidly. "That man in Communications—he said it was all right."

"Man? What man?"

"This man, Traynor."

The voice came from behind me. I whirled by reflex.

Agent Benjamin Gaylord stood in the office's second doorway. He had a paragun in his hand, and the set of his jaw said that he'd use it.

With an effort, I drew myself together. "What nonsense is this, Gaylord?"

"That's what I wondered." He came towards me a few steps,

hide in one piece. So you called Kruze, got instructions to pick me up, and here you are."

Gaylord stared at me as if hypnotized. "How did you know?"

"I warped in without a clearance. But one was on file when I got here. That meant Kruze had guessed some of what I planned and was taking steps. And one of those steps would be to get in touch with you."

Gaylord's expression, at that moment, might have meant anything. Smiling thinly, I moved a trifle closer to the voco. "I do hope it works out for you, you understand. And it may. But then again, it may not. It's hard to predict Kruze's reactions. Somtimes it's almost as if he were unconditioned, like us—"

I gestured as I talked, a lot more than was needed, as if somehow that was going to make the words worth hearing. I walked, too —pacing, turning, anything to keep Gaylord just a bit off balance.

Worry already was closing in on him. It hung about him like a cloak. The paragun's muzzle wasn't following me quite so closely.

My next turn carried me even nearer to the voco. Then, when I started to turn again, I tripped.

It was a nice job, deftly done. I reeled, arms flailing—and crashed bodily into the bulky instrument.

The voco rocked wildly. Scanner, scriber, audex—they all tottered, then swept out in a big arc, faster and faster towards the floor.

Gaylord yelled hoarsely and leaped in, trying to save them.

I waited till he'd passed me. Then, coming up fast, I chopped with a stiff palm-edge at the base of his brain.

He pitched forward. Not even waiting to strike again, or see if he was stunned, or snatch his paragun, I sprinted for the door.

The messenger still stood in the corridor, just outside. Only now, unfortunately, he didn't look quite so stupid or nondescript as before.

Also, he had his hands up in a strega-fighter's stance.

That made him a Security agent.

I dived at him—a literal dive: head down, arms wide, feet and body completely clear of the floor.

The man spun sidewise, fast, with all of a trained strega-fighter's skill.

But my left arm scooped him in, and my weight and impact bore him down. I drove up the heel of my right hand, hard under his chin. His head snapped back.

Spasmodically, he shoved at me with hands and feet alike—trying to break clear, striving to regain the inter-body space that gives a strega-man his advantage.

For an instant I held him tight, then abruptly and without warning matched his efforts to thrust clear with similar of my own. As if spring-propelled, we bounced to opposite sides of the hall.

Strega tactics said it was a time for maneuvering, regrouping, consolidation.

Instead, scrambling on all fours, I rocketed down the corridor and away as fast as I could go.

There were ramps, after that . . . doors and archways . . . more corridors.

Then, at long last, the building entrance yawned ahead.

Sobbing for breath, I raced towards it.

Simultaneously, a knot of hurrying men appeared, crowding in from the street and blocking off the doorway. They were grouped about a bulky, familiar figure . . . the figure of FedGov Interplanetary Security Controller Alfred Kruze.

For me, it was a moment straight out of nightmare . . . a lightning-flash of horror, lifted from one of those awful dreams in which you run and run and run only somehow your legs won't seem to work.

Desperately, I tried to reverse direction.

It was too late. I couldn't brake in time.

SOMEONE YELLED as I careened into the group. I glimpsed distended eyes, a startled face. Clawing, I tried to twist past the wall of bodies and slide out the door.

I might have made it, then. But suddenly a bull-voice roared, "Hold him, rack you! Hold him!"

Controller Kruze's voice.

Like lightning, hands came at me from all directions. I rocked back —dazed by their blows; pinned tight against the wall.

Another moment, and Kruze himself was towering over me.

"So!" He hissed the word, as if his rage were too great for normal speech. "I've found you, have I, finally?" And then, turning abruptly: "Back to the warping-chamber with him! I'll deal with him no place short of the Interplanetary Center itself!"

Now the hands that pinned me jerked me forward. Still panting, head still reeling, I found myself dragged out into the street.

"Controller!" I choked. "Controller Kruze! Please! Listen to me—"

"Don't worry! I'll listen! And so will a trial board, and all those fools in Psychogen!"

"No!" I was shouting now; shouting and shaking. Though whether it was out of my own feeling or from the contagion of Kruze's rage, I couldn't say. "Do whatever you want with me. I don't

care. But not now! I've laid the ground; everything's set up—"

"No, rack you!"—This in a bellow.

But the others pulling at me hesitated, slowed. Desperately, I babbled on: "Kruze, you don't understand! This whole thrill-mill business—it's a Kel scheme to break through, here on Rizal! But you'll never crack it, trying to back-track. You've got to make whoever's in it come to you. That's why I did the things I did. That action order, all the rest—it was just so I could make a contact, be a decoy! I said things that would scare them, raise suspicion. But if you send me back now, it's all wasted. Please, Kruze, please—"

Kruze didn't speak. But standing there, pinioned, looking into his eyes, I didn't need words to know his answer. Not with his hate pulsing out at me like a living thing.

I slumped.

Coldly, then, Kruze said, "Did any of you gentlemen hear me mention the warping-chamber? Or am I going to be forced to take this scum back for trial by rocket freighter?"

Wordless, my captors shoved me towards a grav-car. I went without protest, making no effort to resist.

But as I walked, I let the feeling of the street close in upon me. The green-hazed black of the Rizalian night took on new, subtle overtones. Fragment by fragment, sense by sense, it blended and became one with the mass of tight-integrated information poured into my brain by the psychostructor.

This street—it would be AX7. And that meant the cross-street ahead was MR2.

Which was interesting, because MR2 was also a pneumotube route, complete with sewer-like conduits beneath the paving and access shafts at every corner.

So, if I could by some chance reach that intersection, and duck from sight behind the building . . .

How far was it? Fifty feet? Sixty?

The first of my captors reached the grav-car. Fumbling, he got out his lock-light.

The rest of us paused. Again, narrow-eyed, I measured the distance to the corner.

Smoothly, the lock-light slid into its tube. The grav-car's door swung open. One agent got in. A second stood aside, waiting for me and the men who held me.

Together, we stepped forward. Then I bent to enter the grav-car, and all let go of me momentarily.

There was just one man to my left, now. One man between me and the corner.

I bent still lower—and then, without warning, drove my shoulder hard into that man's midriff, bowling him aside as I raced madly towards the intersection.

But instantly, behind me, yells rose in wild chorus. Feet pounded pavement. Hands clutched for me.

Something was happening to my knees, too, and my lungs. They wouldn't work the way I needed for this kind of running. The fatigue of my earlier bouts was telling on them.

A last gasp; a last lunge. I spilled to the street.

The yells turned to hoarse, baying triumph.

It was the end of something, and the beginning of something.

The end of mankind, perhaps? The beginning of a ruthless Kel march to victory?

I was too sick, too tired, to even think about it.

Only then, just as it seemed certain that the hands of Kruze's men must surely seize me, there was a sudden flash; a silent sound of energy impacting.

Behind me, a man gave a grunt of pain and shock. My own body went numb.

A grav-car whished down from nowhere in the same instant. Incredulously, I felt myself being seized and lifted. A face came out of the darkness to confound my reeling senses.

A lovely face, really. The face of a woman with blonde hair and laughing lips and clear grey eyes.

Celeste Stelpa's face.

Only that was impossible, of course.

Besides, I couldn't seem to make the face stay in focus. While I watched, the laugh changed to a leer.

Then, quite suddenly, blackness closed in . . .

CHAPTER III
CELESTE

THERE WAS A MUSTY smell about this place, and it was deathly still. Beyond that—

I sighed, a sigh that was almost a groan, and shifted. My groping hand slid over something rough, like a coarse fabric. Dust rose and eddied to my nostrils.

It made my head ache even worse. Yet I moved again, and this time caught the faint, half-whispered sounds of friction and of creaking.

Another sigh. Slowly, painfully, uncertainly, I opened my eyes.

Blackness, utter and complete.

The very circumscription of it seemed to freeze me. I lay ever so still, running my tongue-tip along dry lips . . . tasting the grittiness of my teeth. Slowly, recollection began to flow back through me.

My mind picked up a faster beat.

Where was I? How had I come here? What had happened?

Again, I reached out, groping.

I lay on some sort of narrow couch, it seemed. On either side of me it fell away to a rough, dust-filmed floor.

Warily, I sat up and swung down my feet, then waited till my head had cleared.

Rising, then, I felt my way along the couch.

One end of it joined a wall. Still silent, still feeling my way, I followed the partition.

It brought me to a door—a door securely locked.

I moved on again. Four turns later, I bumped against the bed.

That made it a room—a small, tight-sealed room, windowless and with one door, and furnished only with the couch on which I'd lain.

My own role, apparently, was to wait here, humble and patient, till someone came to call me.

The only trouble was, I didn't feel humble, nor patient either. There were too many questions in me; too much anger.

And somehow, all the questions, all the anger, centered around one lovely face.

Swiftly, I ran my hands over the couch.

Only now, it developed, it wasn't a couch; not really. What I'd taken to be a fabric cover was nothing but a wad of sacking draped over a row of fibrox shipping cases.

Fumbling, I located one of the case's opener tabs and sheared away the fibrox.

Smaller cases spilled out, each about the size of a candybox.

A tremor of excitement ran through me. Hastily, I ripped open one of these smaller cases . . . ran my fingers over smooth metal and an array of dials and switches.

A thrill-mill.

For an instant I hesitated. Then, quickly, I ripped away box after box, lining up the mills in a neat row along the wall beside me.

By the time I'd finished, I had no couch to sit on, and the row of mills reached well-nigh half the way around the room.

Now, by feel, starting at the door, I lined up all the dials alike, then threw the activating switches.

Of a sudden, the room was no longer still. Every breath, every shuffle, rose in my ears like peals of thunder. Varicolored sparks flashed through the black. The mustiness grew to a stench that blocked my nostrils. I coughed and choked on every particle of eddying dust.

Beyond the door, there came a rush of feet. A woman's voice cried, "Turn them off, Traynor! Quick, before they burn your brain out!"

"Open up, then! Unlock that door!"

"Yes, yes! But turn them off!"

"Unlock it!"

A bolt flew back with a deafening crash. The door burst open in a dazzling blaze of light.

Blinded, lurching, stumbling, I clawed down switches. My head throbbed till it seemed it must surely split wide open.

But as the mills went off, the tide of experiential wave-shock ebbed. Slowly, the intensity of the stimuli flooding in upon me fell back to normal level. My vision cleared. My head stopped ringing.

Celeste Stelpa stood in the doorway. Her face was pale, her lovely eyes dark-ringed with strain.

I said, "All right. Talk."

"Talk—?" The grey eyes widened visibly. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Where are we? Why'd you bring me here? What's behind this thrill-mill business?"

THE GIRL'S HAND came up in a too-quick movement, smoothing blonde hair already perfectly coiffured. A shutter seemed to close behind her eyes, just as it had on the voco scanner. "Really, Agent Traynor—"

"Would you rather I told you, then?" I stepped past her quickly, peering this way and that to be sure we were alone. "We'll start with why you brought me here; and the answer is, because you're scared."

Our eyes locked for an instant as I said it. Then, abruptly, Celeste laughed—a soft laugh, pleasant and unrestrained.

"On the contrary, Mr. Traynor." She took my arm. "However, let's go back to my quarters, where we can be a bit more comfortable. You must be terribly tired, after that insane ordeal with the mills."

Together, we moved down a dark aisle like that of a storage warehouse . . . then through a doorway into another room, not too much larger than the one in which I'd been.

There was a difference, though: This place was the strangest I'd ever seen. Even the concept was alien.

There were no furnishings, in the normal sense, save bulky, twisted shapes, all knobs and hollows, that I'd have classed as statuary.

The floor, in turn, was weirdly geometric, a thing of slopes and planes, angles and undulations. Pyramids jutted up, adjacent to cubes and octagons and wedges. Color ran riot—here tinting and blending, there contrasting.

Celeste said, "Find a spot that fits you. That's the best way."

Gingerly, I tested the footing, and discovered that the whole

room was surfaced with a substance like a superior, foam-based carpet. Following the girl, I found a hollow at the base of a slab and slumped down.

"Comfortable?"

"Comfortable." I leaned back, studying my companion. "Are you?"

"Am I comfortable, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Of course. Why wouldn't I be?"

"I don't know." I shrugged. "I just thought it might be a little difficult for a human—adapting to the Kel."

"And I think you're trying to fish for information." The girl smiled at me. "You know, you're really a rather remarkable man, Agent Traynor."

"Oh?"

"You asked me why I brought you here—and that's the reason. You caught my curiosity when you talked to me on the voco. So much so I decided to come see you. And when I saw those others chasing you—well . . ."

It was my turn to smile. "You're very convincing, Celeste. I might even believe you, if I hadn't known you back on Bejak."

"Oh, yes. Bejak." For the fraction of a second, the clear eyes shadowed. "It would have been nice if you'd been on Bejak, Mr. Traynor. It really would. But you weren't. Those details—the things you said to me on the voco—they came out of FedGov Security files, of course. You wanted to upset me, to frighten me . . ."

Her voice trailed off, and it was as if she herself, somehow, had left the room. I felt a strange sense of helplessness and guilt. Words wouldn't come.

And it was a time when I needed words, the right words; needed them desperately; needed them now, this instant, if mankind were to survive.

Yet still we sat there, looking past each other in aching silence.

Then, quite suddenly, Celeste asked in a small voice, "Would you trade, Mark? Would you?"

"Would I trade—?"

"Yes. The things you want to know for ones I'd like to ask."

Tension crept across my forehead, stretching the skin tight. "What kind of things?"

"About—about you, m o s t l y, Mark."

IT WAS THE SECOND time she'd used my given name. Her voice held a vibrance that was strangely taut and urgent.

I said, "It's a bad bargain, Celeste. There's nothing to tell about me. Not that anyone would want to know."

"There is, Mark! For me, there is!" She moved swiftly, sliding

across the space between us on her knees. Her hand pressed my arm. "Who is it you hate, Mark? What are you fighting, really?"

"Who do I hate—?" I stared. "Who do you think? Who do any of us hate, except the Kel?"

"But why, Mark? Why?"

I groped; pulled back a little. "You come from Bejak II, and you ask that? Give those monsters half a chance, and there'll be no human race!"

"That's your answer, then? You hate the Kel because of this fight, this war between the races?"

"Of course that's why. Isn't that enough?"

"I don't know, Mark. I really don't." Celeste buried her face in her hands. Her shoulders shook with sudden tremors.

A strange uneasiness stirred in me. Shifting, I slid my arm about her; pulled her to me. "Celeste, Celeste . . ."

"Mark . . ." Her words came muffled. "Mark, why is it that you hate them more than any other man does?"

"I don't. All of us are fighting—"

"No! That's not true!" Celeste's face came up, the grey eyes feverish. "The rest aren't fighting like you are. They haven't gone against Controller Kruze's orders. They haven't violated warping regulations. They haven't thrown a planet into chaos with a deportation edict!"

I rocked back. "Celeste—! What is this?"

"Don't you see, Mark? Everything you've done is different from the others! All the rest—they fight out of discipline, or fear, or maybe even desperation. But you—there's hate in the way you go about it. You don't rest, you don't slow down, you don't stop to think of consequences. To watch you, anyone would swear your children's blood was on Kel hands."

The uneasiness inside me grew. I looked away, not speaking.

"What is it, Mark? Tell me! What's happened to you that makes you hate them?"

"Nothing, rack you! Nothing at all!" The words came out in a rush, almost before I knew that I was speaking. "I'm just like any other agent, except that Psychogenetics picked me to be de-conditioned."

"You were—de-conditioned? —I mean, before you came in contact with the thrill-mills?"

"Yes, of course. Psychogenetics thought a free mind might work better in a fight like this than one pinned down to pattern."

"And what do you think?"

"You've seen what I've done, haven't you?"

"Yes, yes." A pause. "But no one else has acted like you, have they? —Not any of the thrill-mill people?"

"No."

"Then what is it, Mark? Why don't the others behave like you?"

My head was beginning to ache. I gripped it between my hands, trying to fight back the undercurrent of rage that somehow kept trying to well up in me. "Let me alone, will you? I've had nothing but trouble ever since—the first time that Psychogen bunch pulled me in."

"The first time—!"

"What—?"

"There was—more than once—?"

"Yes, of course. There were experiments. I was de-conditioned and then conditioned again four times. Each time, they'd send me out for a few weeks' service, see how I reacted. This is my fifth round. I've gotten to where I hate the very thought of being pushed back down to pattern level. It's flat, all of it—flat and grey and ugly—"

I stopped short, rigid.

Only now Celeste clutched at me, shaking. "Mark, Mark! Don't you see—?"

MY HANDS began to tremble. Then my shoulders. Then my whole body.

And Celeste: "Mark, there's a thing they call—displacement. A way people have of switching headaches. Maybe a man hates his wife. But he's always been taught that he should love her, and the teaching runs so deep he can't hit her.

"Then, by accident, he runs into some other trouble—a little thing, maybe; someone's poor work, or a joke, or bad manners.

"Do you know what he does then, Mark? Can you guess?"

I said thickly, "Nothing. Not if he's been properly conditioned."

"That's right, Mark. Nothing. Not if he's been properly conditioned. He can't even hate his wife in the first place. That's one of the reasons compulsory conditioning came in.

"But back before that, he did something: He struck out; he overreacted; he kicked the dog instead of his wife."

I didn't say anything. I was shaking too hard.

Celeste said softly, "Could that be you in that picture, Mark? Could you be hating one thing and striking another?"

Spasmodically, I drew up my knees and hugged my arms round them—burying my face, squeezing my eyes tight shut in a vain, desperate effort to blot out the room, and Celeste, and the things she said.

Only they wouldn't blot out, because they were inside of me, too,

churning and roiling and spinning round in my brain. I had a queer, detached feeling, as if I were two rather than one, and one of those two was a great, yawning, black pit, and the other hung on the brink, ready to cast himself in.

That was how close I came to madness in that moment.

Then, abruptly, the moment passed. With a curse, I sat up straight, my mood gone suddenly savage.

Celeste's eyes distended. She started to draw away.

I caught her wrist fast; jerked her back. "Where do you think you're going?"

"Mark, please—!"

"Forget it. It's my turn for questions." And then, tightening my grip: "Who's supplying those thrill-mills?"

A thin white line of pain had formed round her lips. But she spoke coolly, levelly: "The Kel, of course."

In spite of myself, I breathed in sharply. "And you—?"

"I survived Bejak II. The price was to help them."

"The thrill-mills—"

"They're part of a plan. Man's conditioned consistency was a bit difficult for the Kel to handle. They felt the simplest solution was to upset the conditioning." A pause. "Thanks to you, they'll probably succeed."

"Thanks to me—!"

"Yes. You see"—a smile, without mirth—"the Kel are shape-shifters. They can take any form. Tonight, an infiltration party will move into Rizal's defenses and take over the posts of the men you had seized. No one will know them from the originals. By morning, there'll be a Kel ship dropping down in the port without interference. After which, we'll all be utilized as laboratory animals for various experiments. The Kel feel we're ideal for that role."

"You know, and you didn't warn us? Your own race; your own people?" I stared at the girl in numb horror, her beauty turning to ashes before my eyes.

Only there was no time for numbness, nor for recrimination. I had too many things to do; too large a role to play.

I came up fast, dragging the woman bodily with me. "Get me out of here. Now, before I kill you."

She tottered, wincing and cringing as I twisted her arm slowly round. But as before, her voice stayed strangely level. "I'm sorry, Mark. I can't do that."

"You're going to!"

"I can't."

I said, "Half a turn more, and something snaps. You won't like it."

"I—can't."

"Why can't you?"

"Because—the Kel—won't let me."

"They won't let you?" I paused in my twisting to make a slow, elaborate survey of the distorted room. "You know, for a second I almost thought you said the Kel wouldn't let you take me out."

"They—won't. Try—to leave. You'll—see—"

There was something in her voice that rasped my nerve-ends. Cat-footed, I spun about, looking this way and that.

Still nothing. Nothing but a strange, misshapen room and twisted, nonrepresentational statuary.

Wordless, I shoved Celeste Stelpa towards the door.

Like an echo, something seized me by the ankle.

It was a tentacle—a tentacle attached to a weird, pseudopodic body that hadn't been there brief moments before.

Frantically, I tried to jerk free.

Lightning-fast, off to one side, a distorted lump of sculpture changed shape . . . hurtled at me.

Floundering and flailing, I went down . . .

CHAPTER IV
THE KINDLY KILLERS

"SOMETIMES you just don't know." Celeste's voice was strangely flat and lifeless in the black. "Sometimes there's nothing you can do but hope and try."

I didn't answer.

Celeste again: "What would you have had me do, Mark? Let them kill you? That was their first thought, you know; you really did upset them with those things you said about me on the voco. They were afraid you knew so much more than you do."

"Forget it," I muttered. "There's no point to going back over it now."

"But there is! For me, there is!" For the first time, in this place, my companion's voice showed a flash of animation. "You were the only one who'd pushed them even a little bit off balance. I wanted to know you—to find out what you had that the rest of mankind lacked. If I could do that and save you too, what was the harm in it?"

"The harm?" In spite of myself, I roused and glowered through the blackness. "What was the harm, when you urged me to tell you—things—not knowing Kel were there?"

"But Mark, I wouldn't have done it if it had mattered! The things you said—those were for me, not them. I knew they couldn't understand them. They haven't any insight into human feelings, human

thoughts."

"After the thrill-mills, you'd try to make me believe that?" I choked. "They know more about the human mind than man himself!"

"No, Mark; they don't!"

"The thrill-mills—"

"I don't care about the thrill-mills! Maybe someone else developed them. To the Kel, we're only a lower life-form, not worth the bother of that much study. We're laboratory animals, adaptable organisms to use as we'd use rabbits or guinea pigs or hamsters. I know; I've been four years with them, ever since that day on Bejak . . ."

She began to sob, then; a soft yet somehow desperate sobbing. Bleakly, I stared down at the hands I couldn't see for the blackness of this dungeon . . . the selfsame dungeon in which I'd lain alone such a short time earlier, except that in the interim our captors had stripped it bare of sacks and thrill-mills.

It wasn't the kind of ending I'd planned. Not here; not locked away, waiting out the hours till the Kel should strike, and win, and end the game.

And me not even on the field.

I cursed under my breath; hammered one clenched fist into the other palm.

"Mark—" It was Celeste again. "Mark, give up. Don't fight it so."

"I won't give up! I can't!" Choking on my own words, I lurched up and stumbled blindly along our prison's walls. "If I knew anything—even where we were—"

"I don't know myself, Mark. These weeks, I've been a prisoner here—a prisoner talking on a voco. They've never let me come or go."

On once more. On about the walls, and on, turn after turn.

On, while mankind's life-span ticked away.

The door came under my groping fingers. I clutched the knob; shook it.

It didn't give.

Something snapped inside me. Wildly, I flung myself at the heavy portal—kicking it, clawing it, beating on it with my fists.

No answer.

I yelled—a fierce, shrill cry to wake the dead. Again, again, again . . . hammering and screaming, screaming and hammering.

Celeste: "Mark, stop it, stop it! stop it! They won't come. You'll only hurt yourself!"

Panting, I drew back, crouched, and then lunged for the slab that blocked our way, hurling myself against it with all my weight and strength.

"Mark, Mark—!"

Again I lunged. Again—again—again . . .

My shoulders were bruised now, my whole body aching. It was all I could do to stumble back for still another try.

Only then, suddenly, light spilled in upon us as the door swung open.

Unbelieving, I rocked back. Celeste Stelpa gave a choked, incoherent cry.

Wider the door swung, and still wider.

I held my breath and tensed my belly, waiting to see what form our foe would take.

Nothing happened.

I looked round at Celeste, and she at me.

Still nothing.

For an instant I stood rigid. Then, tight-lipped, I took a quick, cat-footed step in the direction of the open door.

IN ONE LITHE motion, Celeste was beside me. She caught my hand; clung to my arm. "No, Mark, no! Don't try it! It's a trick, a trick—"

Wordless, not shifting my eyes from the entry, I twisted free of her grasp . . . advanced another step.

I could see out now, in both directions. No one was there . . . only the black, echoing emptiness of an unused warehouse.

I said, "Stay here, Celeste. I'm going to look around."

Instead of answering, she darted past me, out through the doorway into the open area beyond.

"Celeste—!"

She turned swiftly, well beyond my reach. "I'm not going back in there, Mark. Not if you're coming out."

"But—"

"No, Mark. This is a trick. You and I both know it. That door didn't open by itself. But if you go on in spite of it, then I go with you."

I stared at her for a long moment. Then, slowly, I nodded. "All right. Let's go."

"Mark—"

I said, "There's no other way, Celeste. I'm human; this is my race the Kel are out to kill. To me, that means I fight them. I fight them all the way, till I drop, no matter what."

Her eyes were wide as she stared at me. "But what will you do?" She gestured helplessly. "What can you?"

I shook my head. "I'm not sure. But Kruze is here on Rizal. I'll see him, talk to him. He's got power. He can order action."

"But Mark, can you reach him? After that fight—the way you broke away—"

"I'll reach him," I said. "I'll reach him. And he'll listen, too, even if it has to be at gunpoint."

I couldn't tell whether the wordless look she gave me was of despair, or resignation.

Down the dark aisles, then; and that in itself was a strange experience. For somehow, incredibly, and in spite of the surrounding, all-pervasive black, there was always just light enough for us to see our way. Yet where it came from, or how, remained a mystery to the end.

We reached the second room, the misshapen, distorted room in which Celeste and I had sat and talked. It was empty now, all traces of the living sculpture gone.

On again, down yet another of the echoing aisles.

I waited till we reached the first cross-track leading off between stacked battens, then turned aside.

Instantly, we stood in utter darkness. All trace of the guiding radiance disappeared.

Pressed to me, Celeste shivered. I gripped her tight and wiped sudden, icy beads of sweat from my forehead as, hastily, I groped my way back to our original route.

Like magic, light was with us once again.

More shadows, more echoing stillness, more stacked battens. Then another door. A heavy door, barred on the inside.

Sliding back the bolts, I swung it open.

A street.

Not speaking, hardly daring to breathe, we crossed the threshold. I wondered if it were only my imagination that made the stars so bright, the night so still.

The base-block at the first crossing oriented me: We were less than ten minutes' walk from Rizal Security headquarters.

Still wordless, as if by mutual agreement we turned that way.

As we did so, my belly knotted with a new and different type of tension.

Before, there'd been the awful, taut frustration of blocked action.

Now, I faced more subtle torments: the battle of the self, the gnawing problem of decision.

THERE WAS a voco station a block from the headquarters. Stepping inside, I punched out Security's number.

"Rizil Security." It was a sleepy voice.

I said, "Let me talk to Controller Gaylord, please."

A pause, a buzzing. Then, "Controller Gaylord speaking."

"You're up late, aren't you, Gaylord?" Intentionally, I made it mocking.

"What—?" The controller's voice rose, sharp with anger; then fell again, as quickly crafty. "Who is this, anyhow?"

"Who would you think?" I

countered, chuckling. "It's me, of course, Gaylord—me, your dearest friend, Mark Traynor."

"Traynor!"

"That's right." Again, I chuckled. "Does it surprise you so much?"

"Listen, Traynor—"

"I know. You want to get together with me." I paused a moment, letting the tension hang and build. "You know, it could be I'd like to get together with you, too."

"Of course, Traynor." Gaylord was getting smoother, silkier, by the second. "Look, I'm up in my office—"

"—And if I'll just join you there, you'll be happy beyond words to turn me over to Kruze for trial and disciplinary action. Is that it?" I snorted. "No, thanks, Gaylord. I'm not about to play it that way."

"But Traynor, listen—"

"You listen!" I let him have it flat and hard and driving. "If you want to see me, you're coming where I am, alone. Play it any other way, and I'll fade so fast you'll never find me."

"But—"

"Also, I'll figure a way to let Kruze know about you. *All* about you, thrill-mills included."

"Traynor, for heaven's sakes—"

"Is it my way, then? My way, all the way?"

"Yes, Traynor, yes!"

"Good enough, then." I hesitated. "Look: Do you know a thil-shop over on MR2, about three squares from your place?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. Go there. If the lay of the land looks right, I'll join you."

"But—but—"

"Goodbye," I said, thumbed down the contact, and stepped back out of the voco station.

Celeste turned to me—wordless, watchful.

I said, "There's a place on MQ3 where you can get some Ronhnei coffee. Just go straight over. I'll see you there in half an hour."

Still wordless, not even nodding, she turned and moved off in the direction I had gestured.

Pivoting, I took the opposite tack, heading straight for Rizal Security headquarters.

The building loomed dark and forbidding as a mausoleum in the dim green of the night. There was no sign of life.

Still, for a moment, I hesitated in the shadows across the street before crossing swiftly to the entrance.

A lone light glowed in the inner lobby. Passing through the outer doorway, I drew back into the gloom between it and the inner portals.

A minute passed; then two.

Nervously, I ran my tongue along my lips.

Simultaneously, inside the lobby, a shaft-lift's double panels slid back. Controller Benjamin Gaylord got out, looking tense and unhappy, and came towards the street doors.

I pressed even further back from view, flat against the wall of the small offset area just beyond the inner doors. Whipping off my tunic-sash, I looped an end about either hand, leaving the rest of its length to dangle, noose-like, between.

Gaylord reached the inside door. Silently, its eye-beam opened it before him.

I raised the sash . . . poised . . . held my breath . . .

Now Gaylord came through the doorway, intent and striding. Looking neither to right nor left, he crossed the narrow strip between inner door and outer. Ahead of him, the heavy portal to the street swung wide.

Swiftly, I darted in behind him; flipped my tunic-sash up and then down in a wide loop that snapped it tight around his neck.

Gaylord jerked back in mid-stride. He started to cry out.

Savagely, I wrenched the sash-noose tighter. The cry cut off unuttered. When my victim would have struggled, I dragged him back off balance and rammed a knee into his spine.

Rizal's controller made small, choking sounds. His eyes began to bulge, his face to darken.

Jerking him back into the offset niche between the double doors, out of view, I spoke into his ear: "Calm down, you fool! I don't want to kill you."

His eyes rolled wildly, trying to glimpse me. He stopped struggling.

Warily, I loosened the noose . . . . waited while he sucked in air in great, chest-filling gulps.

But not for too long. Before he could stop shaking or have time really to think, I said, "Gaylord, we're going upstairs. If anyone tries to stop us, you're the one who'll get it."

I SHOVED him forward as I finished, and the inner doors opened. The sash a deadly bond between us, we crossed the lobby.

Into the shaft-lift, then. My prisoner shot me an uncertain glance, half hate and half fear. "I don't see why you had to do it this way. I'd have met you at that thil-shop like you said."

"Maybe." I shrugged. "That's not the question."

"Not the question—?"

"We're getting out on whichever floor Kruze has taken over."

A panicky stiffening. "Oh!"

"Come on, come on! Which

floor is it?"

"Seven."

"Good enough." I punched the button and we zoomed upward. "There'll be a guard on duty, of course. You might think about how you're going to get us past him."

Gaylord looked a little green.

The lift slowed. Jerking my sash from Gaylord's throat, I snapped it back in place about my waist and, as we halted, shoved my unwilling accomplice out of the cage ahead of me.

There were two guards in the anteroom instead of one. The first, beetle-browed and heavy-jawed, slumped dozing in a chair. His companion, slimmer and trimmer, sat straighter than was necessary but without a coat, playing a miniature sokkol wheel against himself.

"Visitor for Controller Kruze," Gaylord croaked as the non-sleeping guard looked up. He made as if to stride past the pair to the door beyond.

But as he did so, his head went forward just a fraction, and his left shoulder dropped.

The next item on the agenda would be a simultaneous yell of warning and spin to one side, out of my reach. He might as well have put it on a placard.

I leaped first, by a split-second. When the yell came, and the spin, I was already in position to catch Gaylord's arm as he whirled by.

It changed his course a bit. He crashed bodily into the dozing, bull-necked guard, and they went down together.

But the other guard was rising. Ducking, I snatched up his fallen comrade's chair and hurled it at him.

The man threw up his arms to ward it off. Lunging at him full-tilt, head lowered, I butted him in the stomach.

The wind went out of him in a gust. He tottered backward, his mouth opening and closing in agonized, fish-like contortions as he fought to catch his breath.

I stomped on his foot and gave him a violent reverse shove past me. Lurching wildly, he tumbled into the heavy-set guard—now arising—just as had Gaylord. Together, they went down atop the controller in a comic-opera slapstick tangle.

Then a hand came clear of the threshing clutter of arms and legs. It held a paragun.

I kicked for—connected with—the wrist. The weapon flew wide. I dived after it, arm outstretched.

But before I could claw it up, a voice lashed out, harsh and heavy, from the doorway to Kruze's quarters:

"Don't touch it, Traynor!"

Kruze's voice.

The back of my neck prickled. Carefully, I drew my hand away from the paragun, then turned.

The controller of all FedGov Security's far-flung interplanetary operations stood staring down at me out of heavy-lidded eyes that in this moment sparked cold malice. One slab-like hand gripped a paragun, twin to the one I'd tried to snatch.

"So, Traynor . . ."

"So?" I flung the word back at him with a belligerence to match his gloating. A sudden, swift recklessness surged through me. "I've got some things to stay to you, Controller. That's why I came here."

THE HEAVY-LIDDED eyes didn't even flicker. The thick body stood granite-like, immobile. "What things?"

"Things about the Kel." I got up from the floor; stepped towards him. Sheer urgency drained the anger from me. "Kruze, they're infiltrating. Tonight—right now, maybe—"

"Shall we shut him up, chief? You want us to stop him?"

It was the heavy-set guard, on his feet again now. Beside him, his thinner companion threw me a look of smoldering hate. A sullen-looking Gaylord was dusting himself off behind them.

I said desperately, "Kruze, you've got to listen! I found that girl—the one who called about the thrill-mills on the voco. She's been a Kel prisoner ever since Bejak II. She knows their plan, the details—"

"And just how does she know it?"

"What—?"

"I said, how does she know it?" Never had the controller's heavy-lidded eyes seemed colder, the bulky body less yielding. And then, as I groped: "To the best of my knowledge, no human has ever communicated with the Kel. We don't even know what they look like. Consequently, I find it difficult to accept the concept of alien infiltration as a practical threat, in the face of our warning net and proved defensive measures."

"But they're shape-changers!" Involuntarily, my hands moved in frantic, pleading gestures. "They can simulate men. It's only the conditioned consistency of human behavior that's baffled them—"

Kruze's great head moved. "Guards, I'm tired of listening to this nonsense."

"Yes, Controller." —This from the thin man. As one, he and his companion closed in.

"Kruze, for the sake of all of us, the whole human race! What does it matter what the Kel look like? We've seen their globeships.

We know what happened at Bejak II, at Corrigar, at Astole—"

Hands seized my arms; wrestled me backward.

"Please, Kruze! You've got to listen!"

Nerveless and unrelenting as a granite monolith, Controller Alfred Kruze turned on his heel, stepped back into the room from which he'd come, and closed the door behind him.

The bottom seemed to fall out of my stomach. For an instant I thought I was going to faint.

Gaylord speaking: "Take him down to the detention room. I'll file charges in the morning."

Spasmodically, I twisted towards him. "You, Gaylord! Do you know what it's going to mean if the Kel break through and take Rizal? Lock me up if you want to, yes. Or let these two thugs kick me to death, for that matter. But get to Kruze! Make him listen—"

"I doubt if there's time for him to do much listening." Gaylord glanced at his chrono, spoke with relish. "You see, he's already scheduled to warp back to headquarters in less than an hour. And of course I wouldn't think of disturbing him in the meantime."

For a moment I stared at him in the shock of utter panic. Then—cursing, convulsing—I hurled myself forward.

Just as violently, the guards slammed me back. Ignoring my shouts and struggles, Gaylord pivoted and strode to the shaft-lift, pausing there just long enough to fling me one quick, mocking glance over his shoulder.

The lift's double panels slid aside. Still smirking, Gaylord started to enter.

Only then, inside the cage, movement suddenly flickered.

Gaylord jerked back. His voice rose in a wild, shrill scream of terror. He tried to whirl, to flee.

But a paragun's purple beam flashed like a visual echo to the cry of panic. With an awful, anguished intake of air, Rizal's controller tottered backward. . .crumpled to the floor.

Simultaneously, three men leaped from the lift.

They were unique in their way: Each had two heads.

Beside me, the thin guard choked; snatched for the paragun he carried in a hip holster.

He died before he could even get it clear.

The other guard, the heavy-set one, backed up against Controller Kruze's door, hands already raised. His breath rasped in his throat. His face was dough-grey.

For my part, I couldn't even speak.

And now, within the shaft-lift's

cage, more movement. . .another figure darting forward. A woman's figure.

I choked "Celeste—!"

"Oh, Mark, Mark. . " She ran to me; flung her arms about me. "I was so afraid!"

My throat drew tight. I held her close, smoothing the soft golden halo that was her hair.

Only something was wrong. The hair—it didn't feel right. . .

I straightened, stiffened; stared down at the woman in my arms more intently.

Something was wrong with the eyes, too. They weren't the cool, clear grey that I remembered.

Celeste laughed softly.

But even as she did so, her face began to twist, to change. The features seemed to run together in an incredible distortion.

I tried to thrust her away from me, then.

Like magic, the warm arms twined about my neck reshaped and elongated. Before my eyes, the fleshtones were transformed to grey-green mottling.

Woman into Kel; Kel into woman. The end of an idyll.

I began to laugh. . .louder and louder; more and more wildly. When one of the two-headed men tried to shake me, I spat in his face.

Furiously, he lashed out at me with the barrel of his paragun.

I didn't even try to dodge the blow. . .

CHAPTER V
SHIP OF DEATH

THIS PRISON room was like the inside of a great, glowing, metal sphere Light seemed to radiate from its very walls—strange scarlet light that washed over us in pulsing waves.

Yet weird as it was, I hardly gave it a second glance, nor my companions either. Too many other things kept preying on my mind—things like the gnawing guilt that was mine for violating Kruze's orders. . .the unanswered question of why I, among all men, should seethe with such headstrong hate against the Kel. . .the horror of Rizal's defenses infiltrated, shattered.

Above all, my jumble of mixed feelings as to Celeste.

Only that was a dead end, and I knew it.

Yet still her cool blonde loveliness kept slipping through the shadows of my brain. No sooner did I block the image out on one front than it came cajoling, laughing, mocking on another.

I cursed aloud, and squeezed my eyes tight shut, and gripped my throbbing head between my hands.

flat-footed, the paragun's muzzle a steady focal point of menace. "Finally I got to wondering so hard I put in a non-channel call about it to Controller Kruze himself."

"A non-channel call—!"

"Risky, wasn't it?" Gaylord's grin could hardly have been classified as pleasant. "Still, though, I thought it might be worth a gamble: my future against yours, the way you said."

"So?"

"So it turned out even better than I'd dreamed of. I found out more things!" Gaylord's ugly grin broadened. "You know, Traynor—interesting things. Like how the lame-brains in Psychogenetics deconditioned you over Kruze's protests. How you broke discipline and warped out to Rizal, here, in direct violation of all orders. How the business of shipping all these thrill-mill people back to the Fed-Gov IP Center is strictly your idea, not Kruze's—"

He broke off; gestured with his weapon. "All right, get moving. It's a detention room for you, till Kruze warps in."

THE GUN in his hand was uncomfortably steady. "Good enough to me. All this line about don't care where you keep me, nor what lies you tell, if it makes you feel any better. Though what Kruze is going to say when he gets the truth is anybody's guess."

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Gaylord stiffen. "What's that supposed to mean?" he demanded glowering.

I shrugged. "It seems plain enough to me. All this line about gambling your future—it's a joke. You simply haven't got the nerve to do it."

"I'll let Kruze convince you, then."

"Kruze?" I laughed harshly. "He won't care. Not when he finds the facts put both of us out of the way."

The last remnants of Gaylord's grin were fading. "Listen, you—"

I said, "Shall I play it back for you, Controller? Shall I tell you how it really happened?" And then, pacing a few steps: "You went down to your communications section first, of course; had the sigman on duty put out my all-points order. I know that, because the Stelpa girl sent me a thrill-mill. And unless my order had gone out, she wouldn't even have known I was here.

"Anyhow, you sent my order—and then discovered there was a message from Kruze himself on the hook. Probably it said that if I turned up, you should contact him non-channel.

"You saw that as a good way of getting out of a bad spot with your

But then thick fingers gouged into my shoulder. Their pressure dragged me back from the blackened wastes of my self-recrimination; forced me once again to face the reality of this pulsing scarlet prison sphere.

Wearily, blearily, I opened my eyes and looked up.

Controller Alfred Kruze towered above me, his heavy body grotesque in the crimson radiance.

He said, "Traynor, you know as well as I do that we'll never make it out of here alive. So I want you to know now I'm sorry I wouldn't listen to you. After your insubordination—well, try not to blame me too much; I simply didn't understand."

For a moment I stared at him. My eyes blurred. I choked on my own pent-up emotions. "Controller—if I just hadn't forced Gaylord to put out that action order—"

"I know. But it's not your fault; not really. I shouldn't have let those fools in Psychogen interfere with your conditioning." Kruze's heavy jowls quivered. "Besides, what does it matter now? We're all of us as good as dead."

He turned as he finished; moved off in a restless, plodding circle around our dungeon's canted floor.

A knot drew tight beneath my breastbone. Sick at heart, I looked from one of my companions to another.

Six men; six FedGov Security workers gone astray. From Chief Controller Alfred Kruze straight down to the lowly Sigman Third the Kel had trapped in Communications.

And in between those two extremes, in the middle, stood Special Agent Mark Traynor.

Always, always in the middle. Even here, even now, aboard this Kel globeship.

A sudden clank of metal cut through my introspections. A hatch swung open high overhead.

Taut silence fell over our little group. Fearfully, we stared up at the aperture.

Now a slim rod thrust down through the opening, drill-like. In two seconds it reached and anchored tight against the floor, like an axis for the tiny world that was this room.

Another second, and a bulbous shape slid down the rod. In the radiance, it was as colorless and formless as a red-washed lump of putty. A giant lump, as a hogshead.

Then, as it reached the floor, a change took place. Swiftly, surely, it reshaped itself, drawing taller and thinner and taking on new contours. A man came into being—a tall gawky man, twin of the Sigman Third.

"Here, fellow!" Grinning mirthlessly, he stepped towards the sigman. "Come along, now. Don't be shy!"

Panic flared in the sigman's eyes. Gangling and clumsy, he backed away.

But the quarters here were too cramped for maneuvering. In a rush, the man's Kel duplicate closed in. "Now, wait a minute, fellow—"

The sigman tripped over his own feet and started to fall. Like lightning, the Kel had an arm about him. "Here, now, fellow—"

But in the rush, the arm turned out to be a tentacle instead.

The sigman let out a wild yell. Promptly, his *doppelganger's* head turned into a tentacle also and, whipping round its victim, pinned arms to sides.

FLAILING, screaming, struggling. Inch by inch, foot by foot, the sigman was dragged back to the rod, while we other humans all stood there frozen—paralyzed; unable to speak, unable to move.

Only then, suddenly, I couldn't stand it any more. With a yell of my own, and a curse and a snarl, I lunged into the fray. Tearing, clawing, I fought to free the sigman.

For a moment, it almost seemed I'd turned the tide.

But then, with a sudden shift, the Kel whirled on me. The sigman fell forgotten and it was I, not he, who was beset. Spongy, yielding pseudo-flesh pressed in upon me. Thin tendrils of it touched and clutched me, leech-like. Long tentacles encircled and constricted. I found myself battling for my very breath.

Mercilessly, the creature dragged me to the rod, the axis of the crimson room. Pulpy protrusions wrapped around the metal. I felt the shaft begin to vibrate. With a high, whining sound, it let go of the floor and lifted Kel and me alike into the air. The sphere's dome, the ceiling arc, rushed in upon me. As from afar, I glimpsed the strain-straut, uptilted faces of the other prisoners below.

And now, abruptly, a strange reaction came upon me. It was as if in throwing myself upon the alien foe I'd somehow cast aside my panic. Like the old story of the boy who'd found the nettles didn't prick if only he had the courage to seize them firmly.

We passed through the hatch. A seamless sheen of metal cut off the last sight of my comrades.

Coolly, I gazed about at a room even more weird in conception than the dungeon sphere.

Again, the arc seemed to be the basic motif. But in this place it was a chopped-up, intersected arc,

as if function here had held sway over symmetry.

Everywhere, too, there were shifting shapes, strange bodies—bodies long and bodies short, bodies thick and bodies thin. Some resembled life-forms that I knew. Others bore no resemblance to anything I'd ever seen before.

Yet headless or multi-headed, with visible sense organs or without, drab or vivid in coloration, every one of them appeared to have some work to do. Insectile, pulsing, they swarmed over every arc and angle of the room. Here they pulled at mobile strips of metal. There they maneuvered gem-bright crystal buds through maze-like tracks. Cone-things and cube-things, niches, projections—synchronously or erratically, they turned and twitched and throbbed and twisted.

It dawned on me, then: This chamber was the globe's control-room. These unfamiliar forms were instruments, equipment.

The kind of equipment, unfortunately, that no human mind, uninstructed, could fathom.

Letting go of the rod, my captor carried me across a parabolic wall, then down to a spot where misshapen curves and angles came together in such a pattern as to remind me of the warehouse room with the living statues on Rizal. I was released; allowed to sit.

Minutes dragged by. Then, suddenly, close at hand, another hatch opened. One of the Kel oozed through it, carrying Celeste.

In a flash, all my tensions were back. My palms began to sweat, I had trouble with my breathing.

Gracefully, the girl came close; sat down beside me. "Mark . . ."

I hesitated, trying not to let the ambivalence I felt show in my eyes. "Yes?"

"Mark, please. . ." Her hand rested lightly on my arm. "Look at me, Mark."

It was a lovely face. Kel or not, it was lovely.

"My hair, Mark. Look at my hair. Feel of it."

She lifted my hand as she spoke, and brushed it against softly silken strands.

Involuntarily, I stiffened.

"That's right, Mark. It's real. Not even the most sensitive of the Kel can match it."

I looked at her, then. Full at her, straight into her eyes.

Cool, clear, grey eyes.

HER WORDS came in a rush: "Mark I know what you thought. But it wasn't true, not any of it. I didn't have any more idea than you of why the Kel let us go, there in the warehouse. I'm still not sure, unless they wanted to follow you to Kruze.

"As soon as we separated, four

of them seized me. One—became like me. And after that. . ."

I nodded slowly.

"Mark. . ."

"Don't worry. I'm listening."

"Please, Mark—"

"Let me guess." I laughed abruptly. "They've brought you here to pry some more, get out more information."

A little of the color left Celeste's lovely face. She didn't speak.

"It's true, isn't it?" I jabbed at her. "That's your job here—fronting for the Kel when they have to deal with humans on anything that's more than skin deep."

More of Celeste's color drained. With an unsteady movement, she started to turn away.

I caught her arm and jerked her back so that she faced me. "Answer me, rack you! Isn't it true? Aren't you here to probe me for them?"

"Mark, you're hurting!" A nerve twitched, just below her cheekbone. "It—it isn't anything, Mark. They just—can't understand you. Why you act like you do. Where you find the courage to keep on fighting."

"And you've told them, of course? You've let them know how much I hate them?"

"They—don't understand hate—" She broke off, hesitating; then suddenly swung about to face me. "Besides, it's not true! It's not them you hate! How can you? You don't even know them!"

"Don't say that, rack you!" A red haze swirled across my vision. I let go the girl's arm and struck out at her, slapping.

But she was already twisting, already moving. The slap barely ticked her shoulder. Before I could seize her again, she rolled wide and darted off across the steeply sloping floor-curve.

Surging up, I leaped after her.

But now, off to one side, a Kel swirled swiftly. Like a muddy wave, part of his shapelessness took on form, shoving at a knob-like bulge of metal.

The knob moved. A cone of greenish radiance lanced from an adjoining crystal. Like a searchlight, it swept across the distorted room, pursuing Celeste.

Her eyes came up as, flickering, the beam struck the metal wall beside her. Face stiffening, she cried out in swift panic; flung herself down bodily behind an angling ridge.

The beam whipped back, still reaching for her. Everywhere, the Kel had stopped their shuttling and shifting. I stood alone, apparently forgotten.

And there, not a dozen feet away, was the beam's control-knob.

I made for it in one mad rush, not even stopping to think lest

some Kel telepathic sense should doom me.

For a split second, nothing happened.

Then, out of nowhere, a shrill keening sound hammered at my eardrums. The alien directing the cone of radiance changed shape and darkened to a splotchy purple as he came round, trying to meet me.

Feet first, I plowed into him.

Like lightning, tentacles whipped up to ensnare me. Tissue slapped across my face in a smothering plaster.

But this time I too had my strategy. Wasting no time or energy on the monster's embrace, I hurled myself sidewise.

The Kel tore loose from his anchorage on the metal wall. For an instant he swung in mid-air, unsupported save by his contact with my body.

Violently, I flipped him round, whirling so that sheer centrifugal force carried his body closer and closer to the greenish cone of light that still shone from the crystal.

Again, somewhere, the keening sound rose shrilly.

Instantly, the alien clinging to me gave a convulsive shift, so violent it almost turned me over.

But I was whirling too fast to be stopped by anything short of complete upset. Lurching, staggering, I stumbled still closer to the cone of radiance.

One more step, one only—

The beam spilled across the Kel's extended body. Once—twice—three times the alien whirled into the radiance.

And each time, something hissed, like steam escaping. Tentacles jerked at me in a frantic spasm.

Then, of a sudden, the pseudopods released their grip. The viscous body lost all semblance of tone and tension. . .flew away from me in a short, sodden arc, to land with a splatting sound against the wall nearby.

How much time had elapsed? One second? Two?

I couldn't tell. . I only knew that now, from all sides, Kel were swarming at me in a rush.

I dived for the metal knob that controlled the green beam. With one sweep of my hand, I set it spinning.

The crystal swiveled in swift coordination. The cone of light flashed in a great, swooping arc.

And everywhere its radiance touched the Kel, there was the sound, the sudden hissing. Bulbous bodies went limp. Pseudopodal tissue oozed away like oil on pavement.

Grimly, I spun the knob the other way—hunting down my foes, driving them to cover.

Then—quite suddenly, it seemed—no more Kel were visible. I stood in complete command of the control room of an alien globeship.

I smiled a little at that time, I think—a slow, contemplative smile, with nothing that could be spoken of as humor in it.

After that, tight-lipped, I called, "Celeste! Get up here!"

Hollow-eyed, tousle-headed, she came out from behind the ridge where she'd been hiding.

Not giving her a chance to speak, I said, "These things, the Kel—how do they tell you what they want?"

"How?"—She moved uncertainly "It's—well, one of them—becomes like me. We talk. Then—"

"That's enough," I grunted. "Look around. Start hunting for one who's hiding like you were behind the ridges."

"I—I don't understand. . ."

"You will." With slow deliberation, I fanned the walls with my cone of greenish light. I had no illusions that my grin was pleasant. "You see, Miss Stelpa, somewhere aboard this ship there's a Kel who doesn't want this beam to burn him. He doesn't want it so bad he'll even betray the rest of his kind in order to prevent it.

"Starting right now, we're going to find that traitor!"

CHAPTER VI
THRILL-MILLS, F.O.B.

THE FIRST THREE Kel Celeste rooted out were loyal to their species.

Unto death.

The fourth, it seemed, felt differently about it. Even life in the FedGov's interplanetary zoo, apparently, was acceptable, when weighed against no life at all.

Our problems resolved themselves into routine, almost, after that. . . a course to set, the ship to steer, messages to send to lure other globes into range of FedGov weapons.

Then, finally, the job was done. The last Kel ship save this one had been swept from space and blasted into atoms.

Now, in a rush, fatigue welled up to claim me. I slumped, half-sick. By the time our craft came to rest on Rizal, I wasn't sure I even had strength left to climb out.

Then, at last, our hatches swung open. Aid parties swarmed aboard.

I moved back out of sight. Somehow, I couldn't face the excited flummery and fawning.

Celeste Stelpa, too, seemed to have vanished. No matter where I looked, I couldn't find her.

The first party into the globeship brought paraguns and proton blasters with them. Relentlessly,

they cleared out what was left of the Kel crew, pushing past me almost without notice in the grimness of their work.

Wave Two hoisted Controller Kruze and the other prisoners up from their spherical scarlet dungeon.

It was a moment to remember. For if I couldn't stand the thought of obsequiousness and adulation, Security's chief had no such inhibitions. His heavy body seemed to swell. He beamed and puffed and pranced and strutted.

Conveniently, too, he made no slightest mention of me. Without saying so in so many words, he made it ever so clear that Controller Alfred Kruze himself had saved mankind from the Kel menace.

I smiled a small and twisted smile. That was the way of officialdom, it seemed—in this world or any other.

And what did it really matter?

Only then, without warning, someone said, "—and these people, Controller: the ones who received thrill-mills from the Kel and kept it secret. What do you plan to do about them?"

Kruze's heavy features grew dark. "What would you have me do—to traitors?" He wheeled like an angry mastiff; shook his fist. "They die, of course! All of them! The very fact of past or present possession of a thrill-mill be punished by summary execution, without trial, as collaboration with the Kel!"

I almost cried out, then, by instinct.

Only that could do no good. The thinking part of my brain knew it. So I stood silent, instead; immobile. This quick wave of approval from Kruze's adulators roused only numb shock in me.

Then the controller's aides moved him on out. The rescue parties followed.

I let them go. For my own part, I couldn't leave. Not quite yet.

The last stragglers disappeared. The echoes died. Aching with weariness, I began my own bleakly purposeful tour of inspection.

A dozen times, I lost my way in the maze of rooms and shafts and intersecting passages. A hundred—a thousand—I came upon strange sights, alien things my human mind could never hope to fathom.

Now fatigue bore me down till I had to stop and lean against a wall to rest. I began to wonder if I'd come on a fool's errand.

Then, close to the globeship's exit hatch, I glimpsed a narrow storage niche—a niche stacked high with neat oblong cases.

Fibrox transit boxes.

Involuntarily, my b r e a t h i n g quickened. Dragging down the

nearest box, I ripped it open.

A folded paper fell to the floor: a cargo manifest.

I clawed it up. . .fumbled it open with fingers numb and stiff as sticks.

And there was the stamp, the familiar scarlet label:

CLASSIFIED FEDGOV SECURITY SUPPLIES!

PORT INSPECTION FORBIDDEN

—The label that would permit these boxes to pass customs checks at any port on any planet, throughout FedGov Security's whole far-flung field of operations.

I TURNED BACK to the case itself and tugged out one of the smaller boxes within. . .tore off its wrapper, read the nameplate: 'Apex Perceptual Intensifier'.

Behind me, Celeste Stelpa asked, "Who is it from, Mark?"

I whirled, already crouching. "What are you doing here?"

Her wan smile didn't change. "Waiting for you, of course." And then: "You see—I knew you wouldn't go till you'd run this down. There's still too much of your hate left in you."

"Oh?"

"Hate's that way, Mark, when you displace it. Even if you win one fight, you've got to turn around and hunt another. Because the thing you fight isn't the thing you're really trying to destroy."

I said harshly, "I don't know what you're trying to say. I don't think you do, either. But whether you do or don't, I don't care. So far as I'm concerned, you're just another traitor to your race. You're like that Kel who helped us kill the rest of them so he could live. You did the same thing when the globes took over Bejak II. You let them bring you here, helped them put out these thrill-mills—"

I broke off as Celeste began to shake. My own hands suddenly weren't steady.

A minute passed, and then another and another.

Slowly, then, Celeste raised her face. "I hope you think it through sometime, Mark Traynor," she whispered in a tear-choked voice. "I hope you ask yourself what's back of all the hate that's in you, and then try to link that up with me, so you can find the reason why I helped the Kel put out their thrill-mills."

I stood very still. "Go on."

"Why should I? You already know the answer. Or if you don't, you haven't the mind ever to understand it."

Her hands drew into fists, then. Her words came in a furious rush: "I hated them, do you understand? I hated them more than you could

ever dream of! I was on Bejak II! I saw the things they did—the way the people were slaughtered.

"Only I saw other things too, Mark Traynor! I saw it wasn't the Kel's fault, not all of it. We could have fought them off, if it hadn't been for the FedGov and its racked compulsory conditioning.

"That conditioning—it made us like so many sheep. It robbed us of our imagination, our lust for life, our fighting spirit. And then, later on, when my own patterns broke and I found what our world looked like when inhibition wasn't muting our senses and our feelings—"

Another change of mood, a shift in fervor. Warmth replaced rage. Pleading took the place of anger:

"That's why I did it, Mark. All at once it dawned on me I was hating the wrong thing, the wrong race. I thought that if even a few of our kind could break loose, throw off their patterns, there might be a chance for human freedom. And with freedom, we could beat the Kel.

"You know how I felt, Mark—because you've felt the same way! You hated going back, being reconditioned. Every time, it got harder for you to give up freedom. Only you didn't dare admit it, not even to yourself."

"So I took it out on the Kel, you mean?" It was an effort to keep my own voice steady. "You may be right."

"Then—"

"No. Because this is something else again." I gestured to the boxes that held the thrill-mills. "Do you know where these came from?"

"I can guess."

"Then you know why I've got to follow through on them."

"But—"

"Say that it's for the cause of human freedom. The freedom of all those poor lost souls Kruze has ordered executed. No matter what I have to do, I'm not going to see them die."

Abruptly, I was tired of talking, tired of listening. I turned away.

Celeste said, "But he's gone, Mark. Beyond your reach."

I stopped short. "What—?"

"He warped back as soon as he left the globeship, here. All the way back, clear to the Interplanetary Center.

It rocked me, for an instant. Then I shrugged. "Fair enough."

"You mean—?"

"I warped out to Rizal without a clearance. I can leave the same way."

"No Mark! You mustn't! He could kill you!"

"I'll have a paragun by the time I get there."

"Then I'll go too, Mark! Take me with you!"

"No."

"But why, Mark? Why? Don't you understand how I feel? No matter what happens, I want to be with you."

I said, "You still can't go, Celeste. For two reasons.

"In the first place, I still don't trust you.

"In the second, and no matter what you do or have done, I'm not going to let anything further happen to you. Not if I can help it."

"Mark, I don't care! Even if you try to leave me here, I'll follow!"

"You'll have to, then." Smiling, I pushed past her towards the exit. "Goodbye, Celeste."

"No, Mark! I won't let you go!"

"Goodbye, Celeste," I said again, patting her cheek.

Still smiling, then, I hammered home a knockout blow. . .

CHAPTER VII
FINAL FOE

IT WAS STILL as death inside the space-warp chamber.

But the indicators showed that I'd now reached the Interplanetary Center. Grimly, I shoved shut the switch that released the heavy warp-hatch. . .stood motionless while I waited for the mechanism to grind through its inexorable cycle.

A click. A whir.

I drew a swift breath; eased the paragun from my waistband.

Again, a click. The vault-thick cylinder slid smoothly inward on its guides. Air hissed. The world outside the hatch took form, all dim and shadowy.

For a moment I waited, not breathing. . .straining my ears for the slightest sound.

None came.

Cat-silent, now I clambered through the exit. . .looked down the corridor beyond, with its gleaming ceracoid walls and emblazoned motif of FedGov Security insignia.

Still no one. Moving swiftly down the hall, I sought out the fifth of the row of shaft-lifts.

Soundlessly, it bore me upward. When it halted, I stepped out onto thick, rich veldrence carpeting, crossed to the far side of the alcove, and peered past the draperies into the larger room beyond.

Controller Alfred Kruze sat at his desk, alone, attention focused on a spinning reader-reel.

Shifting, I checked the other door, the one to Kruze's left.

It was closed.

Some of the tightness left my chest. Pulling back the drape, I stepped into the room.

Kruze's head jerked up. The

reader-reel clattered to the desk.

I said, "Don't move, Kruze. Don't even breathe. Not if you want to live."

Kruze's eyes distended. His hands stopped in mid-air.

I crossed to him; gestured with the paragun. "Palms flat on the desk, Controller. Thanks to your private warp and lift, no one knows I'm here. Let's keep it that way. No loud noises, no tricks with buzzers, nothing to attract the attention of the guards in the anteroom. They couldn't do you any good. You'd be dead before they got here."

Kruze lowered his hands jerkily. An angry flush was darkening his face. "Just what's the meaning of this, Traynor? Do you want a trip to the blocking rooms, with orders to psych you down to Drudge Third level?"

Instead of answering, I brought up the paragun and leveled it at his head.

The heavy shoulders shifted, just a trifle. A wariness came to the cold, unblinking eyes.

I said, "Kruze, you've got just one order left to give. You're going to stop those executions on Rizal!"

"Executions—? What executions?"

"You know the edict." I held my voice very flat, very factual. "It provided that any person found in possession of a thrill-mill should be shot summarily, without trial."

"And now you want me to countermand it? You'd have me relieve those Kel-lovers of the penalty for their treason?" Angrily, Kruze gave vent to a belligerent snort. "You're even more of a fool than I thought you were, Traynor. What possible reason can you advance why I should let such scoundrels live?"

"The best reason in the world, Controller," I answered, ever so gently. "It's the only way you can even hope to stay alive yourself." And then, after an instant's pause and with a gesture of my paragun: "You see, I agree with your sentiments on treason—and I also happen to know you're the man who gave the Kel those thrill-mill gadgets in the first place!"

FOR AN INSTANT Kruze's knuckles went white against the desk. Then, quite suddenly, he leaned back. His head seemed to sink down between his shoulders. "You've either said too much or not enough, Traynor."

I said, "I should have recognized it from the start, of course: No alien ever could have achieved such insight into the workings of the human mind. That made our villain a man—a man so high in the Federation that he was allowed to operate under minimal conditioning or none at all; a man who

had access to whatever he needed in the way of supplies or equipment or personnel, and no questions asked or answers given.

"Give a man like that a lust for power. Then throw in a stalemated war against the Kel—a war that neither side can hope to win.

"As a human among humans, our man's authority is strictly limited. Conditioned or not, our race has had enough of despots.

"But supposing he can help the Kel to victory? Mightn't they be willing to make him absolute and autocratic ruler of his kind?"

Again, I gestured. "There it is, Kruze. That's how you worked it. And that's why you were so bitter when I kept blowing everything apart.

"All along the line, there were pointers to your collaboration. Like the way the Kel turned loose Celeste and me, back at that warehouse on Rizal. That was your work: You didn't want to chance my having too much contact with them. So you ordered them to let me go.

"And don't bother reminding-me they took you prisoner, too. Because that was more of your own planning. You didn't intend to take chances of being killed accidentally, once the actual invasion got under way.

"If that's still not enough—if you want court proof—I found cargo manifests aboard that globeship that I captured. They show the thrill-mills went to Rizal as classified Security supplies. With that to go on, it won't be any trick to find the techs who made them. They'll tie you to it tight."

Silence. A long, long moment of silence.

Then, abruptly, Kruze asked, "How many people know about this, Traynor? Just you? Or is the Stelpa girl in on it too?"

I shrugged. "Does it matter? I'm here, now. You're trapped. That's all that counts."

"Perhaps." Heavily, the controller shifted in his chair. "Very honestly, Traynor, your hypotheses are all wrong. But even the unfounded accusations could prove a nuisance, so tell me: What would it take to persuade you to forget all this? Money? A guarantee that you'll stay unconditioned? A planetary controllership?"

I didn't answer.

"I might even go so far as to countermand my execution edict, if that really matters to you." Kruze frowned thoughtfully. "I hate to chance it, though. Those mills shatter conditioning badly. And once that's happened, someone's likely to jump to the wrong conclusions, the way you've done."

Wearily, I shook my head.

"Save your breath, Controller. The only deal I'll make is not to kill you, providing you stop those executions. Beyond that, you'll have to take your chances with the courts."

Silence again. And still Kruze sat granite-solid in his chair. Only his eyes showed that he'd heard me—the emotionless, unblinking eyes that never left mine for an instant. Between us, the desk-top gleamed dully, bleak and bare as a sheet of the wind-polished black lake ice you see sometimes in the wintry hinterlands of Bejak II.

I tightened my grip on the paragun's butt. "The order, Kruze. Write it down, ready for plating, or I shoot."

A thick-shouldered shrug. "Very well, Traynor. If that's the way you want it. . ."

Kruze leaned forward.

The next instant, there was the faintest of humming, whirring sounds, apparently issuing from the desk.

Simultaneously, involuntarily, my right arm jerked forward and down. The gun tore from my fingers and slapped against the desk-top's polished surface with a noisy *crack!* as if impelled by unseen springs.

For the fraction of a second I lurched off balance—incredulous, gaping.

Before I could recover, Kruze whipped a gun of his own from the desk's sorter-slot. His voice rang with harsh triumph: "As you said earlier, F r i e n d Traynor—don't move, if you want to live!"

The light in his eyes said even more. I stood ever so still.

Heaving up from his chair, he came around the desk, pocketing my own paragun in the process. "You're an ingenious man, Traynor. So I know you'll appreciate ingenuity in another. You see, a buzzer can be under a desk just as well as on top of it. And sometimes, instead of buzzing, it turns on a magnetic field strong enough to jerk an anvil clear across the room. I've found it quite effective in discouraging would-be assassins. It's so unanticipated—like this—"

The controller had come abreast of me as he spoke. Now, without warning, he suddenly hammered a sledge-like fist straight to the pit of my stomach.

Retching, I lurched back; bent double.

Savagely, Kruze brought up a rock-hard knee, square into my face.

Jagged pain-colors exploded in my brain. I crashed to the floor, the room swirling around me.

Kruze again; words coming from afar: "No noise, now, Traynor! As you warned me, we mustn't attract the attention of my guards.

We'll just leave the way you came —down the shaft-lift, into the space-warp, and then away on a little trip."

GROGGILY, prodded on by kicks, I lurched to my feet. . . stumbled back to the alcove and the shaft-lift. My nose was bleeding badly. My belly screamed protest at every step.

Down, now; all the way down, with Kruze and his gun crowded close against me. Then a death-march that ran the length of the corridor from the lift to the space-warp chamber.

When I lagged at the entry-hatch, my captor gave me yet another kick, from behind and to the hinge of my left knee, so that I fell through the slot bodily, sprawling on my face on the stone-hard floor inside.

More kicks, as Kruze himself entered. I lurched from his path and, shaking, dragged myself onto the nearest bench. My nails gouged the plasticon in stiff-fingered spasms of pure homicidal fury. But always, always, there was the gun in Kruze's hand—an unwavering gun, centered dead upon me and backed with eyes as bleak and chill as far-off Pluto's ice-mass.

Now Kruze stepped to the warp-board, adjusting controls with swift, sure skill. "This should interest you, Traynor." He talked as he worked, a cool, conversational monolog. "As you know, a space-warp calls for both transmitting and receiving units. For round-trip travel, you have to have both at each terminal point.

"That fact gave me an idea—one designed to take care of crises just such as this one you've precipitated.

"First, I looked for precisely the right planet: one not only uninhabited, but completely devoid of any means of sustaining life.

"I found the ideal spot when an exploration party visited Aldebaran's solar system. It's a world there they named Sheol—a planetary hell, an abode fit only for the dead.

"In accordance with my orders, techs installed a space-warp chamber on it, complete with a receiving unit.

"There's no transmitter, however. So whoever's sent there can plan on permanent residence, alive or dead.

"That's where you come in, Traynor: You'll be the first among those permanent residents. . ."

Somehow, I didn't even shudder. It was as if I'd been expecting such; as if this only reaffirmed my insight into Kruze and his potentialities for evil.

But the controller was still talking: ". . .and then, there's the mat-

ter of the girl. From your very reticence, I take it for granted you've confided in her. So I'll simply see that she's hunted down, supplied with a thrill-mill, and then executed on the spot for possession of it. I suspect it can all be taken care of before she even realizes that anything out of line has happened to you."

I looked up, then. Slowly. Painfully. Still not quite believing.

"That hit you, did it?" Kruze laughed—a harsh, mirthless sound, deep in his throat. "I thought it would. That's what happens, when a man's emotions run unconditioned, unrestrained."

I gripped the bench. I had a feeling that all my nails were broken, my fingers bleeding. But I didn't look to see.

Kruze said, "I know. You're trying to nerve yourself to rush me. Only believe me, it wouldn't do any good. I can ship you to Sheol dead just as well as living."

He turned from the board as he spoke, so that he faced me squarely. Never had the gun been steadier; never the challenge of the cold eyes more apparent, more relentless.

"Rack you, Kruze!" I choked. I couldn't keep my voice from shaking.

"Would you like to check my logic, Traynor?" My tormentor was openly taunting now, his whole heavy body aquiver with enjoyment. "As I see it, once you and the girl are dead, I've nothing to fear. If you'd told anyone else about this, any man, he'd have come here with you. Because not even an unconditioned fool like you could have enjoyed playing out a hand like this alone. Right?"

I didn't answer.

"You and the girl, you and the girl. —Traynor, perhaps I can solace your final hours on Sheol. Instead of having the girl summarily executed, it may be I can arrange a less public end for her so that she spends a long time dying. Does that appeal to you?"

I waited for a moment before I spoke. Somehow, for no good reason, it seemed that I had to find precisely the right words, the right pattern.

Then, abruptly, that moment passed, and language no longer mattered.

"Kruze," I said, quite levelly, "count on one thing: I'm going to kill you."

The controller's eyes widened, just a fraction. "Traynor, you fool—!"

I got up, paying him no heed. It was a stolid, unhurried movement, better suited to his temperament and heavy body than to mine.

"Traynor, I'll shoot!"

I laughed aloud.

"Traynor—!"

I said, "Don't worry. You'll kill me. But I'll still get to you, even so. Dead or alive, bare-handed, I'll tear open your throat and bash your brains out!"

"Traynor, listen. . ."

Flat-footed, unspeaking, I took a slow step towards him.

Kruze's knuckles whitened on the paragun's trigger.

Deliberately, I took another step.

Just as deliberately, Kruze adjusted his aim.

And there it stood: Beyond all doubt, Controller Alfred Kruze would kill me.

What were the odds, then? How much chance did I have, for all my talk, of charging in to strike him down?

Only I didn't have any choice but to try. Not really. Not with Celeste's very life at stake.

Tight-lipped, I drew a long, deep breath.

Only then, incredibly, off beyond Kruze, by the warp-room's entrance, movement flickered.

The breath caught in my throat. I forced myself to hold my eyes full front on Kruze.

OVER BY THE HATCHWAY, the movement resolved itself into a death-pale, shadow-silent figure. . .the figure of a woman, creeping out from behind the solid banks of micromesh transistors.

Celeste.

Only that was impossible.

I began to shake.

Kruze laughed. "It's not so easy, is, it Traynor? Not when you know the other man will shoot!"

I didn't answer. I couldn't.

And still Celeste moved, like a figure out of nightmare. Step after aching step, closer and closer to the entry.

Kruze again: "All right, Traynor. Make up your mind. Have you got the nerve or not?"

Against the wall, Celeste's sleeve whispered in the stillness. It seemed incredible that Kruze showed no sign that he heard it. Desperately, and in a voice that cracked till it held no faintest resemblance to my own, I said, "Don't worry, Kruze. I'm coming."

I poised, ready to lunge. Over by the hatch, Celeste was reaching out. Stretching, her fingers touched, then grasped, the light-switch.

Her eyes flicked to me in the same instant. Her other hand came up in a swift signal.

Like an echo, the lights blacked out.

I lunged, then. Sidewise and down, hurling myself away from the line of Kruze's aim.

Simultaneously, almost, the paragun's pencil-shaft of purple fire lanced through the black, straight

to the spot where I had stood.

I dived in low, striking blindly for Kruze's legs. Pain from the shock of impact splashed through my shoulder. Together, my quarry and I crashed to the floor.

That stone-hard floor.

Writhing, I rolled clear of Kruze, then brought up my legs and smashed my feet into him with all my might.

Breath went out of him in an anguished, incoherent gust. Hands clawed at my ankles in the darkness—jerking me close, wrenching my leg around.

I rolled fast with the twist. Groping, I flailed and pawed at the thick, heavy-muscled body.

An ear came under my fingers. Mouth. Nose. Hair.

Savagely, I jerked the head high, then threw my whole weight forward on it as I smashed it to the floor.

It struck with a pulpy, popping sound. The body twitched convulsively, then went limp.

For an instant I lay there slack-jawed, staring stupidly into the darkness.

But Kruze still didn't move. The hands that but a moment before had sought to break my leg now sagged like sodden sacks of meal.

Panting, half-sobbing, I pulled myself clear. Then, lurching erect, I stumbled to the grey circle that was the entry-hatch and fumbled for a light.

Another hand was already on the switch.

That instant—it lasted through five hundred centuries and more.

Then, raggedly, I whispered, "Celeste—? Celeste?"

The answer, just as ragged: "You didn't really think I'd let you come alone?"

And somehow, after that, there was only the bright future stretching out before us, our future and an unconditioned mankind's, and there wasn't any need for light or words. . .

The End

★ Mathematics Gone Wrong ★

THE CALCULUS of Newton and Leibnitz was conceived in strife and has been a bitter subject ever since. This remarkable scientific tool, without which modern science would not be possible, was until fairly recently a patchwork job of *ill*-logic. It was such a tremendous discovery and it was so easy to use it to make other discoveries in science and engineering that until the end of the Nineteenth Century, nobody questioned whether or not its foundations were logical.

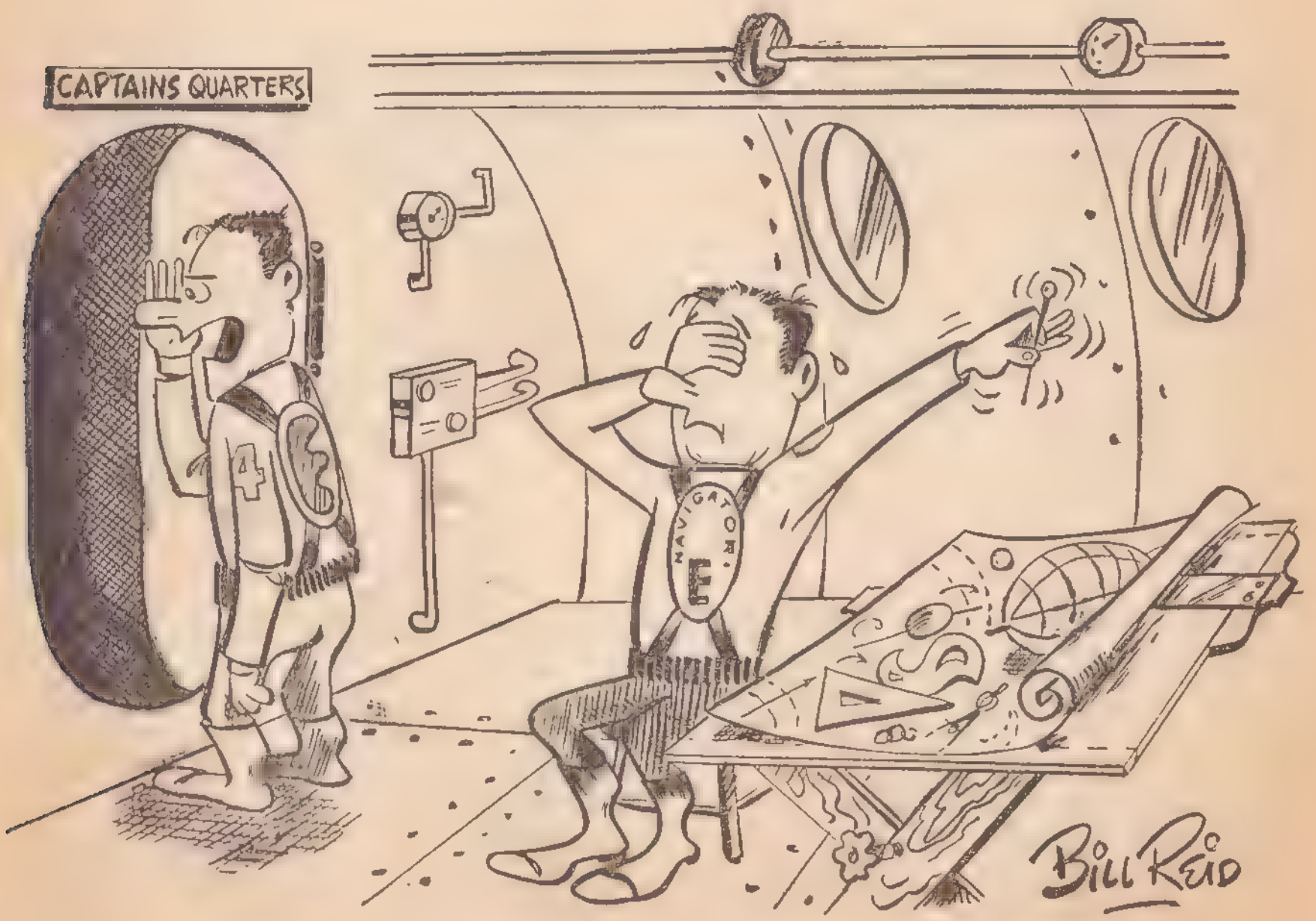
As it turned out, they were not. People simply learned rules, as a child learns arithmetic, and as usefully, they applied them with the results we all know—a world of superb technology.

But the calculus had to be rooted in the thing most familiar to us, the number system, one, two, three. Nothing else would do, because every mathematical system ultimately can be reduced to these terms with the possible exception of Topology.

And even today, after the marvelous work of Cauchy, Weierstrass and others, the calculus as it is taught in colleges, is full of holes. Generally, until the study of advanced calculus, you are not studying mathematics, but manipulation. In addition, one of the great modern mathematicians, a geometer named Karl Menger, protests vigorously, the present symbolism. Analytically and logically, he shows that the present symbols are not foundationally sound.

The fortunate thing about the art is that engineers and scientists can use it without really knowing what it is about—that's only a slight exaggeration. Newton and Leibnitz are turning in their graves.

★ ★ ★



"He says he'll give you our exact position in a minute, sir."

SPECIAL SCIENCE FEATURE

Rocket Motors

THEIR DESIGN, FUELS AND THRUST

by

Henry Bott

RESEARCH ENGINEER

A scientist, speaking of rocket engines observed: "If it takes brains to fly a rocket, it takes genius to build one." And here's why.

IT IS GENERALLY conceded that the familiar powder-rocket was invented in China ten or fifteen centuries ago. How remote from the Chinese rocket-maker's mind was the idea that in his hands he held a slim powder-filled tube which would one day be the key to conquering the Solar System!

Everyone has watched the brilliant trajectory of a Fourth of July rocket arch across the sky to burst in a shower of stars a thousand feet overhead. Among all the brilliant engines and mechanisms of civilization what is there about this primitive device that promises to take men to the stars?

In an earlier article (IMAGINATIVE TALES, May, 1958), it was pointed out that the implacable foe of those who wanted to reach great heights was gravity, the invisible force which binds men to the surface of the Earth. With the invention of the balloon, the Zeppelin and the airplane, in a certain sense gravity can be said to have been conquered, for it no longer restricted motion to a two-dimensional surface. The very earliest thinkers about interplanetary travel thought in terms of a figure of speech to which we still cling today—"flying" to the Moon.

Flying however requires a medium—air. And it was learned very early that the medium between the Earth

$$m\frac{dv}{dt} = -c\frac{dm}{dt} \longleftarrow \left\{ \text{equation obtained from describing forces on rocket neglecting gravity and air resistance} \quad ma = \frac{d(MV)}{dt}, \quad \text{or,} \quad ma = -c\frac{dm}{dt} \right\}$$

or $\quad mdv = -c\,dm$

$$dv = -c\frac{dm}{m}$$

$$\int dv = -c\int \frac{dm}{m}$$

$$v = -c \ln m + C \qquad (1)$$

boundary conditions:

at $v = O$, $m = M_o$ (initial mass, rocket + fuel)

$v = V$, $m = M_t$ (final mass, rocket)

from (1)

$$0 = -c \ln M_o + C$$

or $\quad C = c \ln M_o$

hence $\quad V = -c \ln M_t - c \ln M_o$

thus $\quad V = c \ln \frac{M_o}{M_t}$, this is the final velocity of the rocket

where the above symbols are

v = instantaneous velocity of rocket
m = instantaneous mass of rocket
c = exhaust velocity of rocket gases
dm/dt = rate of mass flow from rocket motor
$c\,dm/dt$ = thrust (force) developed by rocket motor

Figure I

The basic equation of rocket motion—Newton's First Law

and its relatives is nothingness, vacuuity, emptiness. So, from an Earth-bound viewpoint we have limited ability to conquer gravity and travel in three dimensions, but from a cosmic view we are still as

two-dimensional as ever.

It is evident then that not only does a fierce central force-field keep us from penetrating space, but there is not even a medium on which our machines can operate. Space will not support wings nor react to wheels. The problem of traversing the airlessness of space was met by so astute a prognosticator as Jules Verne by the hurling of his inhabited projectile into space from the mouth of a giant cannon in his "De la Terre a la Lune." This totally impracticable solution to the Moon-Trip was his tribute to the twin monsters of gravity and airlessness.

In fact, to the earliest proponents of space travel the problem of airlessness looked more insoluble than that of gravity. But in the latter half of the Nineteenth century two more sanguine prophets of interplanetary flight recognized that there was a device at hand which could conquer airlessness. Hermann Ganswindt suggested a rudimentary rocket and the Russian pioneer Tsiolkovsky was so accurate and specific as to suggest a liquid-fueled rocket—the very engine that not many decades later threw Sputniks I and II into their orbits!

Flatly, without equivocation or qualification, it may be said that the rocket is Man's tool for exploring the Solar System. Yet in spite of its power which has been shown to us often recently, much confusion exists about this simplest of machines. Even today one hears "yes, I see that it works, but what does it push against?"

What is a rocket? Or better, what is a rocket motor? The term "rocket" generally is used to describe the entire vehicle which we know as the spaceship.

A rocket motor is a reaction machine which, like all machines that apply forces, depends upon the application of Newton's Third Law of Motion. You'll notice that it is impossible to speak of rocketry or interplanetary travel without using Sir Isaac's name again and again.

Figure I pictures the mathematical explanation of the rocket motor. A simple differential equation describes it succinctly and accurately.

But for a qualitative discussion of a rocket motor let us go back and consider Newton's Third Law which states that "to each action there is an equal and opposite reaction." We would transliterate this slightly to "to each force there is an equal force, oppositely directed." *My* weight (gravity) pushes against the Earth with a force of 130 pounds. The Earth reacts against my weight with an equal force oppositely directed. I remain still. There is no relative motion.

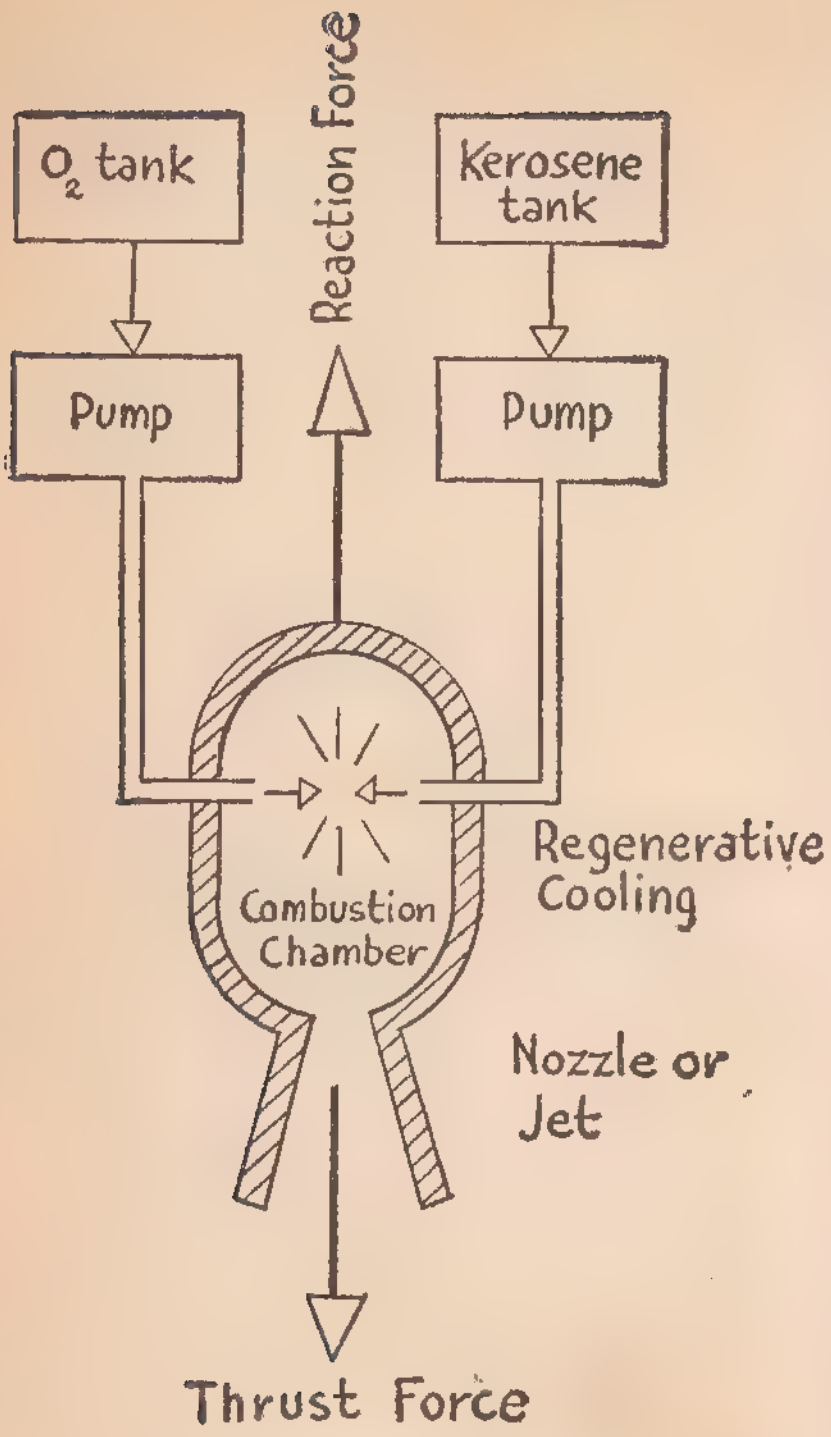


Fig. 2

Combined schematic-pictorial description of liquid-fueled rocket motor. Fuels might be H_2 and O , Alcohol and O_2, or other oxidizing and reducing agents including flourine and boron.

I fire a gun. Expanding gases force out the bullet while the gun thrusts back against me. I hurl a brick and if I'm not properly braced against the Earth I might fall backwards—the reactive force.

To see how this reactive force enters into the action of a rocket motor, imagine that you are isolated on a frictionless surface, say a sheet of ice. You weigh 150 pounds and in your hand you have a 1 pound brick. If you hurl the brick away from you at a velocity of ten feet per second, you will be thrust backwards in a direction opposite to which the brick is traveling, at a speed of 1/15 feet per second. This result is gotten by equating your momentum (your mass times your velocity) to the momentum of the brick (its mass times its velocity) and solving for your velocity. This is a consequence of the fact that momentum must be conserved. The momentum of the "you-brick" system was zero before hurling the brick. The momentum of the "you-brick" system must be zero afterwards. This can only happen if the force which propelled you was oppositely directed, at the momentum of hurling, to the direction of the brick.

If you had a supply of bricks you could continue hurling them, each time increasing your present velocity. A simple formula could tell you what your end velocity would be.

In essence that is the principle of the rocket motor.

The rocket motor however does not hurl bricks but molecules of

gas and these with enormous velocities. In fact, the smaller the molecules of gas, and the higher the speed with which they are ejected, the better. This latter fact is also indicated by Figure I where the letter "c" stands for the speed with which the rocket exhaust gases are emerging. The larger this "c" the greater the ultimate velocity of the rocket.

This principle of creating a force in one direction by somehow exerting a force in the opposite direction is the core of the reaction motor, the rocket engine.

Ganswindt imagined that his spaceship was propelled by hurling bullets rather than gases. He did not understand that the smaller "gas-bullets" would have been better.

The key-point that must be recognized in the reaction or rocket motor is that its operation is dependent only upon reaction to a force in the opposite direction. In no way does the rocket motor "push" against anything. Any medium in which it operates actually interferes with its operation by slowing down the velocity of its exhaust gases. For this reason a rocket is most efficient when operating in empty space—the space of the void—and noticably less efficient when working in the atmosphere or underwater.

Admittedly it is hard to divorce the conception of a "push" from the reaction principle, but only when you have not seen it done. Rockets sitting on the launching pads obtain no additional thrust from the splash of gases against the pad. It would be desirable to have a hole beneath the rocket to avoid this splash effect and on rocket test stands you'll often notice that there is just such a hole.

CONSIDER the basic rocket motor (Figure II). It consists of a chamber in which propellants are going to be burned, fuel lines leading to this chamber, a cooling jacket around which fuel circulates to prevent the rocket motor from burning up, and an orifice from which the exhaust gases can be directed to emerge with high velocities—nothing more. It is hardly more sophisticated in appearance than a skyrocket. Actually it is a highly refined machine.

Physical chemistry can tell us exactly what fuels are best. For example it is known that fuels of low atomic weight and high heat of combustion are desirable in order to have the six, seven and eight thousand feet per second exhaust velocities necessary for overcoming gravity. In theory liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen would be ideal. But the physical problem

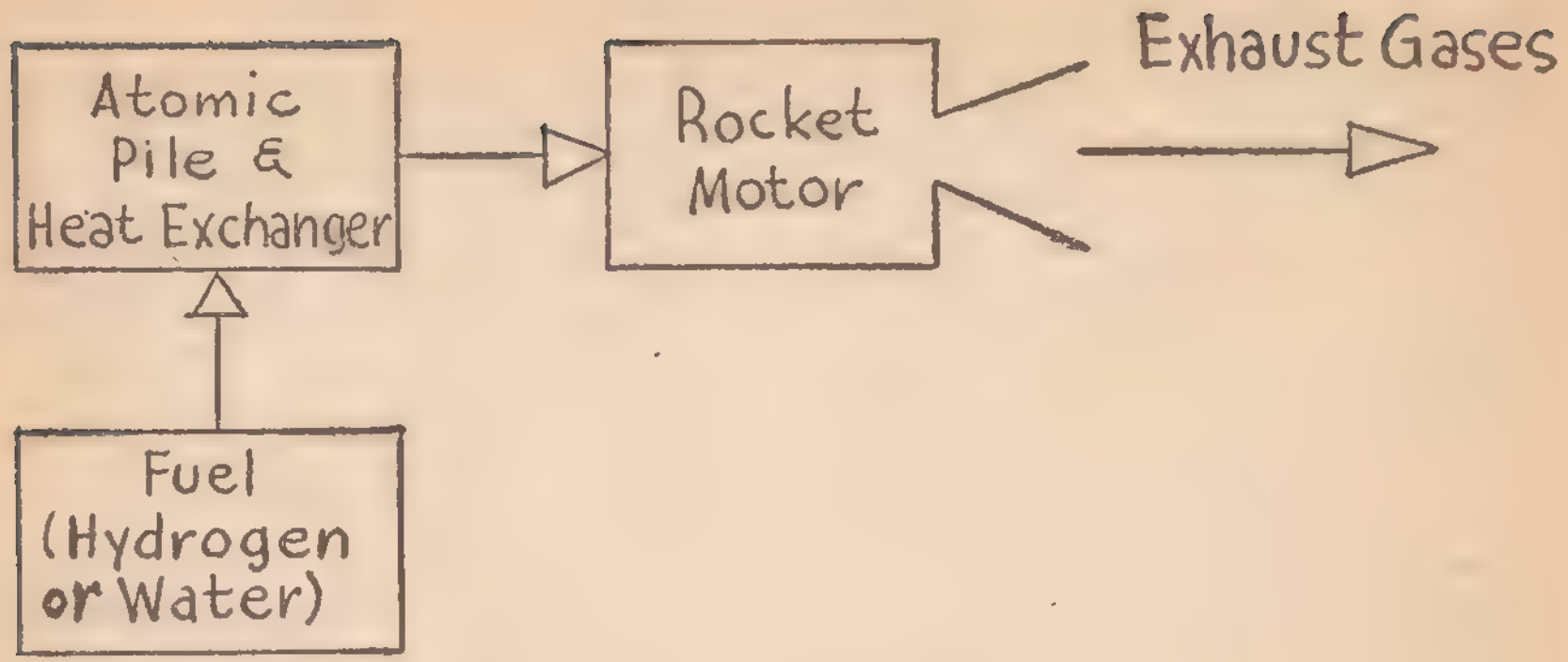


Fig. 3

Schematic diagrams showing principles behind hypothetical "atomic" rocket motors. Technical difficulties associated with these proposals are awesome, but may be resolved.

of handling unstable liquid hydrogen so far is insurmountable. Petroleum derivatives and liquid oxygen are commonly used and the newer boron fuels also are coming to the fore.

Regardless of the types of fuel, they must be pumped separately

to the combustion chamber. Special, powerful pumps have been devised for this purpose because the fuels cannot flow into the chamber by pressurization for their containers would have to be impossibly strong —and heavy—and weight is anathema in a rocket.

To keep the walls of the combustion chamber from melting, the Goddard regenerative principle is employed, that is, the incoming fuel flows *around* the chamber before it enters the chamber.

The nozzle or orifice of the combustion chamber must be made of heat resistant ceramics or metallo-ceramics which will not erode under the fierce blast of ravening gases.

Not indicated is the necessarily complex system of valving and piping used to control the flow of fuel from tanks to rocket motor, nor is the complicated electrical and electronic auxiliary equipment shown.

The problems presented by these things are engineering problems of a difficult level and high order. But they have been solved.

Of more than casual interest is the capability of the rocket motor. What can it do in terms of work and power? Given the limitation of fuels what can we expect of a rocket engine in the way of thrust (force) and in the way of lifting power? What velocities can a rocket attain?

This latter is the all-important question because the height to which a rocket will rise depends on the velocity it attains in the brief time that the rocket motor is running.

A study of Figure I will amplify some of these ideas.

The question is often asked, "why are you so concerned with the final velocity of the rocket, the velocity at 'Brennschluss' (burnout)?" "Why not," it is asked further, "don't you just keep the rocket motor running until you reach the necessary velocity?"

The answer to all of the above questions is closely linked to and tied in with the equation of Figure I, which in essence summarizes the behavior of a rocket. A rocket can carry only so much fuel, it has so much weight, and the velocity of its exhaust is of such a value. The equations of Figure I show how these facts are tied together.

A rocket is thrown into space by one enormous thrust of only a few minutes duration. With minor exceptions, after this thrust has ceased the subsequent trajectory of the rocket has been fully determined, almost in the manner of a thrown stone. All of its fuel has been used up in this push, and what remains of the empty rocket is now only the useful payload. A

consideration of this fact explains the importance of the equation derived in Figure I,

$$v = c \ln (Mo/Mt)$$

Two things stand out in this equation. "c", which is the exhaust velocity of the rocket gases must be as high as possible because clearly the velocity attained by the rocket varies directly with this quantity. Double "c" or triple "c" and you double or triple "v". Chemistry however and thermodynamics limit "c". Pushed to the theoretical limit of fuels and rocket motors "c" might someday go as high as 12,000 miles per hour. For the present one-half of this value is more realizable. Remember when considering these figures that "escape velocity" is 25,000 miles per hour.

The ratio Mo/Mt, the mass-ratio, is the other important factor. It is the ratio of the rocket-plus-fuel-mass to the rocket-mass, the ratio of the mass of the rocket before "burn-out" to the mass after burn-out. It is this ratio which determines how the end-velocity of the rocket will be related to the exhaust velocity of the rocket's gases. If the weight of the rocket plus fuel to the weight of the rocket empty is "e" (2.7. . .), the end-velocity of the rocket will equal "c." If the mass-ratio is about 7.5 (e^2), the end-velocity of the rocket will be 2c; mass-ratio about 20 (e^3), the end-velocity of the rocket will be 3c. . . and so on.

Obviously if we make the mass-ratio high enough we can reach any multiple of the exhaust velocity that we desire. However there is a practical limit to this mass-ratio. Besides the pay-load of the rocket the attached tanks and structural members constitute some mass so that probably the useful limit will be between two and three (the V-2 as a meteorological rocket did very well with a mass-ratio of almost four!).

Because of these inexorable laws of physics expressed by the equation relating rocket velocity to exhaust velocity and mass-ratio, it would appear that it would be impossible to attain velocities capable of projecting bodies into orbits, much less into space to the Moon. It looks as if even the Sputniks could not have succeeded.

The trick of course lies in compounding the rocket, that is, making the payload not a dead mass, but another rocket! By piling Pelion on Ossa, that is stacking two or more rockets, and thus creating the "step-rocket", the end-velocities of the rockets become additive. If we have a three stage step-rocket each stage of which has a mass-ratio such that it can attain a speed of twice the exhaust velocity, the

end-velocity of the final stage will be three times 2c or 6c! If c is 4500 miles per hour (a realizable figure even by today's standards) 6c is 27,000 miles per hour—well over escape velocity.

Of course this wonderful solution is not obtained free. It is paid for by the complications occasioned by the complex apparatus necessary to detach the burned-out stages. Observe also how you are cleverly discarding mass which is of no use when you drop it instead of having to accelerate it to no practical purpose.

The bigger you can make the first stage naturally the greater the end-mass you can project into space. Rocket motors with thrusts of 500, 1000, and 1500 tons are foreseeable.

The all-important equation relating v, c, and Mo/Mt is an oversimplification since it does not take into account the term "-gt" (the Earth's gravitational drag) nor does it consider another negative term involving air-resistance. But even these factors do not modify the expression enough to prevent it from being a very realistic description of a rocket operating under thrust. The technicians can't ignore the terms of course, but for the purposes of this article it is not necessary to consider them in that great detail.

PERHAPS ONE outstanding fact emerges from an analysis of this sort coupled with a consideration of what already has been done with rocketry, and that is—using chemical fuels and the relatively primitive rockets which we possess, the Solar System is conquerable! The step between V-2 and the Sputniks is a lot longer than the step between Sputniks and the Moon.

Doing work against gravity in terms of one initial thrust requires the expenditure of enormous amounts of chemical energy. When the work required to reach a given height is calculated it means much less in appreciable terms than does the power of the engine which produced the work. Because the work is done in such a short time—the rocket engine is running only for a few minutes—the power is fantastically large. It is found by multiplying the velocity of the rocket by its thrust. Even so primitive a rocket motor as that of the V-2 was generating a *half-million* horsepower! Large rocket motors will be rated in terms of millions of horsepower. Rocketry is the art of controlling explosions.

The metallurgical and chemical accomplishments in building engines which are capable of sustaining power dissipations like these are worthy of admiration. The most refractory substances erode like

sugar under a stream of water beneath the blast of rocket gases. It is fortunate that the combustion periods are so short for no substances could long endure the fiery hell of a rocket engine.

We have not gone into any detail about the very difficult problems associated with handling the reactants. Liquid oxygen is far more difficult to handle than say nitric acid. When flourine is used as an oxidant, the problems will be worse. It is unlikely that solid fuels will be used for the bigger rockets though this does remain a possibility. As more is learned about the fundamental properties of materials it is conceivable that metals, ceramics and combinations of both will be developed to the point where they will not any longer be a limit to temperatures and exhaust velocities; thus fuels may be used to their maximum capabilities.

All of this discussion has been predicated upon the existence and operation of the chemical rocket motor. Is it possible that there is an alternative to this engine? Is there some other way of propelling a hypothetical space ship? The answer is both a "yes" and a "no."

Regardless of what sort of device we may design for propelling a space ship it must be based upon the reaction principle—that is, it must eject "something" at very high velocities so that very high reactive forces will be produced. A stream of gas such as the rocket motor of today produces, is what we may expect in any rocket engine.

The question is whether or not the high-velocity stream of gas must be produced by chemical combustion. Because effectively all that is happening within the rocket motor is that the molecules of gas at very high temperature are being channeled into a stream by the rocket nozzle, is it possible, we ask ourselves, that this temperature can be obtained another way?

Naturally one immediately thinks of atomic power, both fusion and fission!

Suppose the rocket carried an atomic pile capable of raising the temperature of some gas, say hydrogen, to high values through an appropriate heat-exchanger. This gas could then as easily be ejected through a nozzle or jet. The major trouble with an atomic rocket motor of this sort lies in the difficulty of constructing a heat-exchanger capable of giving its BTU's to the gas rapidly enough. In addition there would be the problem of radioactive gases ejected while the rocket was still in the Earth's atmosphere.

Some form of constrained and controlled hydrogen fusion process

which is being intensively worked upon now, might also be used in the same way. From a long-range point of view this appears more probable than the fission method.

Both of these methods present almost insuperable problems for the present state of rocket technology. Any thinking we do about immediate developments in rocketry must revolve about chemical rockets although it is not amiss to weigh the possibilities.

When we reach the stage where space ships of the chemical variety have been used to construct a space-station, when there are permanent satellites circling the Earth and we are contemplating the long trips to the planets, then more thought will be given the possibility of other propulsive forms than chemical rockets.

In addition to the use of separate heat generators to raise exhaust gases to the necessary temperatures, far-sighted speculators have proposed what they call "ion-rockets" and even "photon-rockets."

On long interplanetary trips it is visualized that velocities can be built up slowly through low accelerations. Consequently the powerful thrusts of chemical rocket motors could be dispensed with in the light of economizing on fuel. If an electric device capable of ejecting charged particles, electrons or positive ions, could be mounted in the ship, sufficient thrust could be obtained to propel it.

The "photon-rocket" envisages the same type of thrust but this obtained simply from light-pressure! Perhaps such methods could be used on enormously long interstellar flights, but for interplanetary trips it appears as if the chemical rocket will be necessary for a long time to come.

From time to time it is suggested that some "super" fuel, some miraculously powerful chemical will be discovered that will at one stroke extend the power of the rocket engine many times. Unfortunately this sanguine belief is denied by the facts. Thermodynamics and chemistry have a clear picture of what chemical fuels can do.

THE REAL HOPE of improving rocketry, that is, taking it from the realm of limited chemical fuels, lies in the development of a heat-exchanger or a modification of hydrogen fusion. If these developments occur—and they will one day—the power of the atom with its energy orders many times higher than chemical combustion systems, will be at the service of the spaceman. See Figure III.

The most important service to be gotten from chemical powered rockets in the immediate future is

that of setting up permanent, manned satellites. If Mankind never got further into space than the few tens of thousands of miles the satellites would be located at, the service rendered by such satellites would make the effort worthwhile from every viewpoint including that of economics. But of course no such distance limitation will exist because from the satellites to the Moon and planets is a far lesser jump than from the Earth to the satellites.

As this article has shown, the most important single aspect of interplanetary flight is the development of the rocket motor. A host of ancillary problems exist but these—control, communications, environment, are nothing at all compared with the overwhelming importance of the rocket engine.

It is as if Nature has tantalized us by supplying us with just the minimum means for traversing space, means which must be used in an optimum way with almost no leeway to spare. That perhaps is a succinct description of what the rocket motor powered by chemical fuels gives us.

The history of technology is studded with examples of supposed technological limitation which turned out not to be limitations at all, but rather directions to proceed on another tack. With the exception of mastery of the controlled hydrogen fusion process rocket technology does not seem to have a sanguinary background. Rather rocketry has been a steady painful advance along perfectly defined lines. For fifty years we have known the way and the method—both contingent upon painfully slow and tedious developments in fields far removed from rocketry itself. Metallurgy, automatic controls, chemistry and a hundred other arts and sciences have contributed their bit to make the modern rocket motor possible.

The most satisfying event of the whole story is that we can look into the sky and see something which was not there before; something man-made. From Neolithic barbarism to satellites in the short span of a hundred thousand years is an accomplishment by any interplanetary standards! We don't know of any other inhabitants of the Universe who have done the same. . .

THE END

FEATURED IN THE JULY ISSUE OF IMAGINATIVE TALES:

PLANET OF EXILE

by EDMOND HAMILTON

A thrilling interplanetary novel — on sale April 29th

Peter Conroy had been born in deep space and the starship was the only home he knew. It was a good reason why he must fight for this—

Voyage To Procyon

by

Robert Silverberg

IN THE DEEPEST LEVEL of the mighty *Starship I,* Peter Conroy lay hidden in a cornfield. Around him waved the tall stalks of ripening corn; high overhead, near the distant ceiling of the level, blazed the actinic lights that irradiated the broad field.

And nearby, Conroy could hear the stealthy footsteps of Bayliss Kent and his men, searching desperately for him. They *had* to find him—and Peter Conroy had to keep from being found.

Crouching low, he edged forward between the bending stalks. Kent thought he had Conroy hemmed in, that he had the entrance to the cornfield guarded. Conroy grinned. He had been brought up in the Agronomy section; Kent and his men hadn't. It made a difference.

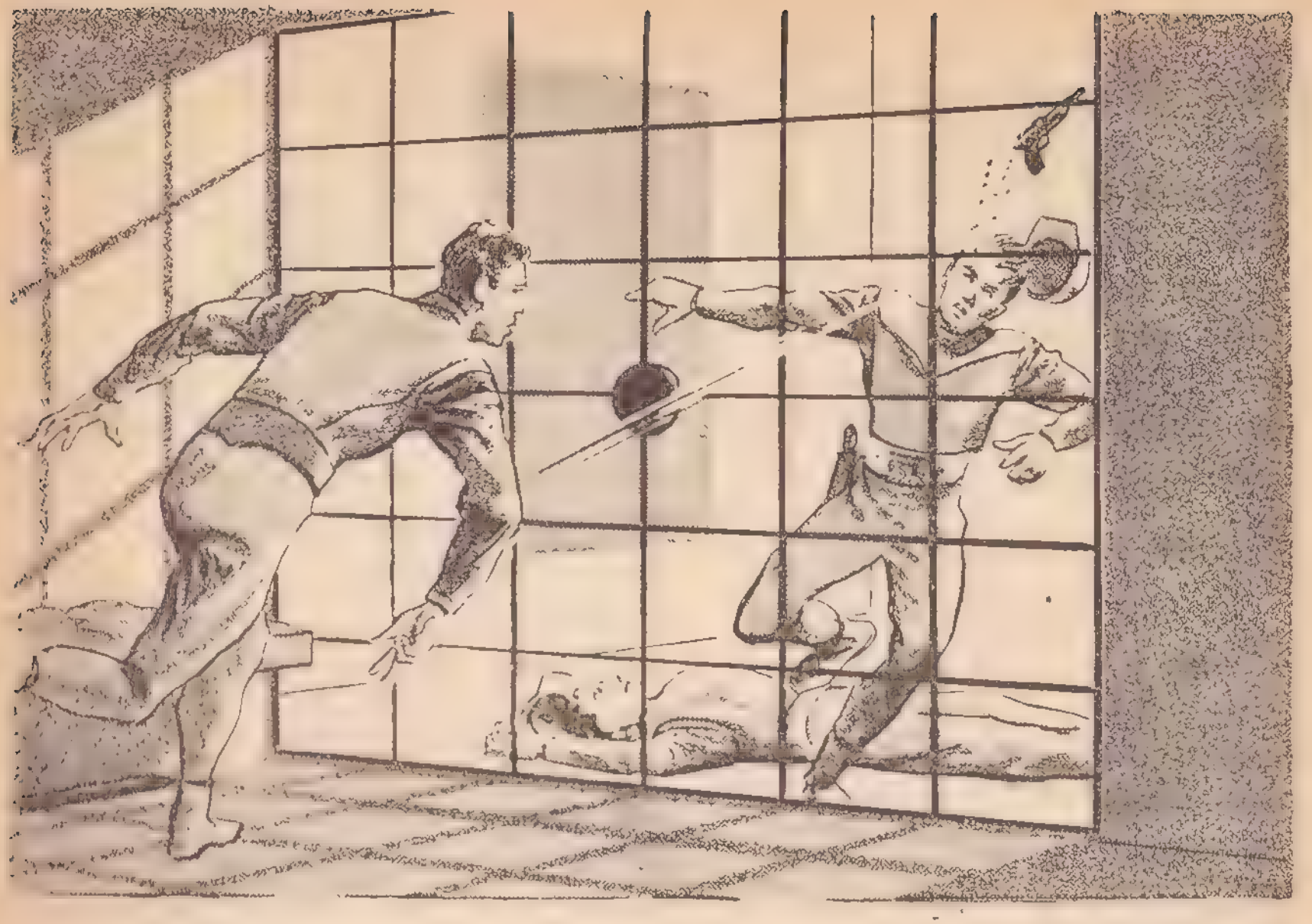
He looked around carefully, then began moving slowly away from them on his hands and knees. *If I can only reach the irrigation tube in time,* he thought. *If—*

It had been over fifty years since the *Starship I* had left Earth. For more than half a century, the great ship had been headed toward the star Procyon and the planets around it—habitable planets, detected by the Lunar telescope. Fifty years; and there was still a hundred years of flight yet to come before the huge ship reached her destination.

Conroy and all the others of his generation had been born on the ship, as had most of their parents before them. The ship, with its vast farms, its great factories, and its clusters of living centers, was all the world they knew.

But Bayliss Kent and his little party of malcontents wanted to change all that. They wanted to go back to Earth.

Suddenly, something crackled under Conroy's knee, and he froze. A dry leaf—nothing more. But had



the others heard it?

He couldn't be sure. The searchers were making quite a bit of noise themselves, and perhaps they might have thought it was one of their own group who had made the sound. He decided to risk it, and moved on.

Just ahead of him was the irrigation tube. Again Conroy called on his special knowledge of the Agronomy section. This particular acreage of corn was in the harvest season—almost ready to cut. There wouldn't be any water in the irrigation tubes now.

The tube was a little over three feet across and dropped down into the sub-levels of the ship, where the water-purifiers were. Conroy peered into the tube's depths for a moment, then lifted up the hinged cover, lowered himself into the tube, and braced his feet against one side and his shoulders against the other.

Closing the cover, then, in total blackness, he began to lower himself down the tube. Hands, shoulders, feet; hands, shoulders, feet. Over and over again, as mountain climbers work their way up and down crevasses.

After several minutes, he was startled by a sudden glow of light from above. He glanced up. The

opening of the tube was nearly a hundred feet overhead now. He wondered if they would be able to pick him out in the darkness, this far down the shaft.

"Can you see him?" called a voice that echoed through the steel tube. Conroy could see a head silhouetted against the light.

"It goes straight down, and there's no ladder," came the reply. It was Bayliss Kent's voice. "I don't see him down there."

"What kind of tube is this?" the first voice asked. Hal Lester, Kent's chief henchman.

"Irrigation, I think."

"Well, if he *has* managed to get down it, he's gotten clean away. Bayliss, I told you we shouldn't have let Conroy know our plans."

"Never mind that now!" Kent snapped coldly. "Search the cornfield! He must be here somewhere —and we've got to find him before the local agronomist comes by on his inspection rounds."

THERE WAS THE SOUND of the door being lowered, and darkness came again. Peter Conroy heaved a sigh of relief and continued working his way down the tube.

He knew these tubes well. His father was an Agronomist, and, until Peter had taken up navigation, he had helped his father on the farmlands. The ship was like a sealed world, a hollow metal planet five miles in diameter that was carrying its crew through space on the generations-long voyage to Procyon.

Or would the starship ever get to Procyon? Was Bayliss Kent going to succeed in his plan to force the Commander to reverse the ship and return to Earth?

Not if they depended on Peter Conroy to navigate for them, they wouldn't!

Conroy, working his way down the tube, suddenly felt emptiness as he lowered one foot. He had come to the end of the vertical tube. Twisting himself upright, he dropped the remaining six feet into the huge arterial tube that ran horizontally into this sector of the ship. The escape hatch shouldn't be too far from here. The pipes needed cleaning after the irrigation period was over and the tubes had entrance ports for the purpose. Conroy strode down the tube in total darkness, keeping one hand against the side. He opened the hatch and found himself in one of the pumping rooms.

"Halt right there!" a voice said. "You're under arrest!"

It was one of the pumping room guards, levelling a snub-nosed stun gun at him. "Who are you? You know it's illegal to be in the irri-

gation tubes without authorization."

"I know," said Conroy. He knew he had no time to make explanations. He had to get to the Ship's Commander.

He stepped forward too quickly for the astonished guard to react. His fist ploughed into the man's chin, and his other arm deflected the snout of the stun gun just enough to send the neutrino stream over his left shoulder. The gun clattered to the floor.

The guard turned, aimed a wild swing. Conroy walked inside the other man's guard and dropped him with a short punch to the stomach. Whirling, he grabbed the stun gun and gave the man a brief, numbing blast.

Opening the entrance to the tube, he dumped the unconscious guard in, saluted the disappearing man with grim irony, and slammed the door closed, jamming the lock. It would be quite some time before the guard found his way out of the tubes.

He put the stun gun in his belt and pulled his tunic down over it. Then he headed for the levitator shaft that would take him up to Officer's Territory.

IT WAS NOT EASY for a young officer to get to see the Captain; the old man held many lives in his hands, and he was busy most of the time. But Peter Conroy didn't dare trust his message to one of the underlings; he had no way of knowing how many of them were already sympathizers with Bayliss Kent. Undoubtedly, many of the younger officers were with him.

Kent's idea was simple. Why should the younger generation spend their entire lives cooped up on the *Starship I*, he asked? If the ship were turned around now and full power were applied, they could make it back to Earth in a little over ten years. That, of course, would use up all the fuel that would normally be used in the next hundred years—but what would that matter, if they were back on Earth?

And Bayliss Kent had also pointed out that there was no possible danger of a counter-revolution. Once the ship started back, it would have burned so much fuel that it could only continue on to Earth—it couldn't try for Procyon again.

To many of the younger men, it seemed like a good idea.

But they needed a navigator. The logical one, they had thought, was Peter Conroy. But Conroy, shocked at the idea of mutiny against the Captain, had made the mistake of telling Bayliss Kent to his face that he would have noth-

ing to do with the plot.

They had been in a Shopping Center at the time. Kent had simply drawn his gun and marched Conroy to the Agricultural Section. The idea had been to kill him and bury him in the field. The body wouldn't be found for at least a year, possibly never.

Conroy had barely managed to escape with his life.

And now, he had to get word to the Captain before Bayliss Kent did anything desperate.

He walked down the long corridor toward the Captain's Quarters. There were officers bustling around the corridor, moving from one office to another; most of them were administrative officers, doing their job of governing the people of the ship.

The guard at the door of the Administration Office saluted him and said nothing as he went inside. He walked over to the appointment desk.

"I'd like to see the Executive Officer, please," he said.

He had to see the Exec to get permission to speak with the Captain. He expected to have to wait quite a while even for the Exec, and so he was quite surprised when the pretty blonde sergeant told him to go right in.

"He's in conference," she said, "but he wants you there."

"Thanks," Conroy said, puzzled.

He walked into the Exec's mahogany-panelled office—and found himself staring squarely down the muzzle of Bayliss Kent's pistol.

"WELL, WELL—the prodigal returns." Kent's lean face wore an ugly sneer. "Get your hands above your head, Conroy."

"How did you get here?" Conroy demanded. "And where's the Exec?"

Kent shrugged. "How did we get in? Very simple. I told the Exec I had important news of a mutiny—which I did. The Exec has been—ah—disposed of."

"And I suppose you're going to kill me now?"

"No," Kent said surprisingly. "Things have changed." His eyes narrowed. "One of my men got a little over-enthusiatic, I'm afraid. The Chief Navigator has been killed."

"And you think I'll navigate for you?"

"You'll have to," Kent said in blunt tones. "You see, we're going to turn the ship around. If you don't navigate, the ship will never get back to Earth." He smiled coldly. "Surely, an idealist like yourself would never allow a shipload of innocent people to drift through space for all eternity."

Conroy felt a chill at Bayliss Kent's words. He knew that Kent was right. He *had* to do it— unless

he could stop Bayliss Kent first. And it didn't look as though he had much chance. There were five men against him.

"What are you going to do?" Conroy asked. "Lock up the main officers?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to kill them," Kent said flatly.

"But why? Once you turn the ship around and start back, there won't be anything they can do."

"Not to the ship," said Kent. "But they could have us killed anyway. And, after all, the main reason for this mutiny is to make sure that we see Earth before we die."

Kent signalled to two of the men. "Take him back and lock him up in the cell. Watch him while the rest of us finish the job."

He gestured behind himself. The Executive Officer was the law-enforcement officer aboard the ship, and behind his office the detention cells were located.

Conroy felt the two men grab his arms and push him through the open door into a cell.

One of his captors pressed a vibro-key against the locking plate, and the magnetic field came on, clamping the door tight against the frame.

"That ought to hold you," the man said hoarsely, and with his companion returned to the Exec Officer's cabin, leaving Conroy alone.

Conroy sat down heavily on the metal bench along the side of the cell and strained his ears for voices from without. He couldn't hear anything. Evidently Kent and his henchmen had set about their mutinous work.

Conroy scowled. He knew what he was up against personally. They would lock him in the Navigation Observatory for the next ten years, keeping him prisoner while he guided the *Starship I* back to Earth. In all probability, they would shoot him as soon as he was no longer needed as navigator. It would be, he thought, better to die now. But if he did, there would be no one to navigate the ship -- and once the fuel gave out, all people aboard would be forever lost.

Of course, it might be possible to figure a way out in ten years. And even if he didn't, he could leave a message in the navigation log for the officials on Earth to decode. But what good would that do, really? If this expedition failed to reach Procyon, a century of human effort would have been wasted.

Conroy decided he'd have to take his chances now. This was the time to act.

HE HAD ONE ASSET: the stun gun. They hadn't bothered to search him, and so he had

been left with one weapon, of sorts.

The trouble with a stun gun was that it wasn't deadly. He couldn't simply point it at the guard who had the vibrokey and force his way out. All the guard had to do was to refuse to hand the key over. If Conroy stunned him, he wouldn't be any better off than before. He had to think up some alternate plan.

He doubled over, clutching at his stomach—and still grasping the stun gun in his hand. *"Ohhh!"*

The guard came over to the door of the cell and peered downward suspiciously. "Don't pull any phony sickness with me, Conroy. I'm not going to come into that cell."

Conroy hadn't expected him to. Only a fool would fall for that ancient gambit—but it served Conroy's purpose to have the guard come close to the door.

With one smooth motion, he pulled out the stunner and fired. The guard looked astonished for a bare instant, then dropped senseless.

Quickly, Conroy ran over, put his arm through the bars, took the key, and applied it to the plate. As the field shut off, he heard a voice.

"Hey! What's going on down there?"

Conroy swore silently. It was the other guard!

He straightened up and surreptitiously pocketed the vibrokey, remaining inside the cell with the door open. He waited for the other guard to approach.

"What happened here?" the guard said, running up with a drawn pistol.

"I didn't do anything," Conroy said. "He just keeled over like that." He shrugged innocently.

The second guard frowned and reholstered his pistol in order to bend over his fallen companion. That was just what Conroy had been waiting for. He jerked up the stun gun and fired.

And nothing happened.

The gun's charge was gone!

"Hey!" At the sound of the click, the second guard snapped his head up and went for his gun.

Conroy hurled the useless stunner straight between the bars of the cell. The butt of the gun struck the guard between the eyes, and he dropped to the floor on top of his companion.

Acting quickly, Conroy threw open the door of the cell and scooped up the ray pistols of the two guards. Then, shoving them both within the cell, he locked them in with the vibro-key. He smiled. So far, so good. He turned to run back toward the Exec's office.

There was no one there. He eased the outer door, gun in hand. Everything looked normal enough, in the outer office. Hiding the ray pistol in his tunic, he strode boldly out.

The blonde at the desk said: "Why, yes, sir. The Captain and the other main officers left here several minutes ago."

"Was anyone with them?"

"Ah—yes, there was," she said. "Lieutenant Bayliss Kent and some other junior officers."

Conroy nodded. That was as expected. "Did they say where they were going?"

"There seems to be something wrong with the atomic furnace at Number Nineteen Thrust Tube. I heard them say they were going down to check it."

"Thanks."

He had no time to call anyone, no time to explain. He had to move fast if he was going to save the Captain and the others. Somehow, the thought of Kent's murdering the Captain was inconceivable. The old man had been on the ship half a century; he was the last survivor of the original crew, and was as much a part of the great starship by now as the drive engines and the navigator's turret.

Conroy could see the whole fiendish plan. Bayliss Kent had forced the ship's officers down to Number Nineteen Thrust Tube, one of the huge projectors that drove the mighty ship through space. All Kent needed to do would be to kill them with ray pistols and claim that something had gone wrong with the atomic furnace. It would be impossible to disprove.

And then Bayliss Kent would be Captain.

Unless Peter Conroy could stop him.

He raced through the gleaming, twisting corridors of the giant ship, running frantically down and down toward Number Nineteen Thrust Tube. He pushed his way past surprised crew members, circled into the lower levels of the ship, made his way through the network of passageways that led to the blast tubes. Finally he reached Power Section.

The guard at the door was one of Kent's men. He looked up, startled, as Conroy appeared.

"Where are you—?"

Before the man could do anything, Conroy cut him down with a shot from his ray pistol. This was war—civil war—and there was no time for subtlety.

He stepped over the body and flung open the door of Number Nineteen.

HE TOOK IN THE SITUAtion in a glance. The Staff Officers, including the Captain, were lined up against one wall,

and four of Kent's men were aiming their ray pistols.

Kent was saying: "Ready—aim—"

But the last word never was uttered. Kent was beginning to form it when Conroy got both his guns out and started to fire.

His first bolt smashed down the nearest executioner; a fraction of a second later, the man next to him dropped. Their attention deflected from the victims to Conroy, the other two and Kent whirled to face the newcomer.

Two more bolts blasted out—the first dropping one of the remaining gunmen, the second singeing Bayliss Kent's shoulder. Conroy hit the floor as a buzzing blaster bolt from the third man ripped over his head and splattered into the wall behind him.

Firing from the floor, he put a bolt through Kent's remaining man—a moment after the gunman had raked the officers with his blaster. Some of them were dead; Conroy had no way of telling which ones. He had a more urgent problem.

Bayliss Kent was coming toward him—and the blaster needed recharging.

There was no time to perform the operation. He hurled the dead pistol at Kent's midsection and plunged after it. Kent met him head on. Even with a numbed shoulder, Bayliss Kent was a formidable antagonist. His big fists pounded into Conroy's stomach, driving him back against the blaster-seared wall. He felt heat radiating through his uniform, then pushed away and stepped forward.

His fist travelled in a short arc and crashed into the already-singed shoulder of the other man. Kent roared in pain, and Conroy mercilessly drove a fist into his stomach, sending him spinning dizzily backward. Conroy followed with a final punch and Kent cracked heavily against the metal wall of the unit and slumped to the floor.

Conroy looked around. The mopping-up operation was complete.

As for the ship's officers, the wide-beam blaster had done its job well. Three of the men were shapeless corpses leaning against the wall, and two of the others were badly wounded. And one of these two was the age-bent figure of the Captain. The old man was still alive. Conroy knelt at his side.

"Captain! Captain Conroy!" Peter shouted.

The old man opened his eyes. "Hello, son. That was a beautiful job you did."

"But I was too late!"

The old captain shook his head. "No. I didn't have much time, anyway I'm a very old man now." He raised himself on one elbow.

"Who else is left?"

Conroy glanced around. "Supply Officer, Power Officer, Maintenance Officer," he said. "And you."

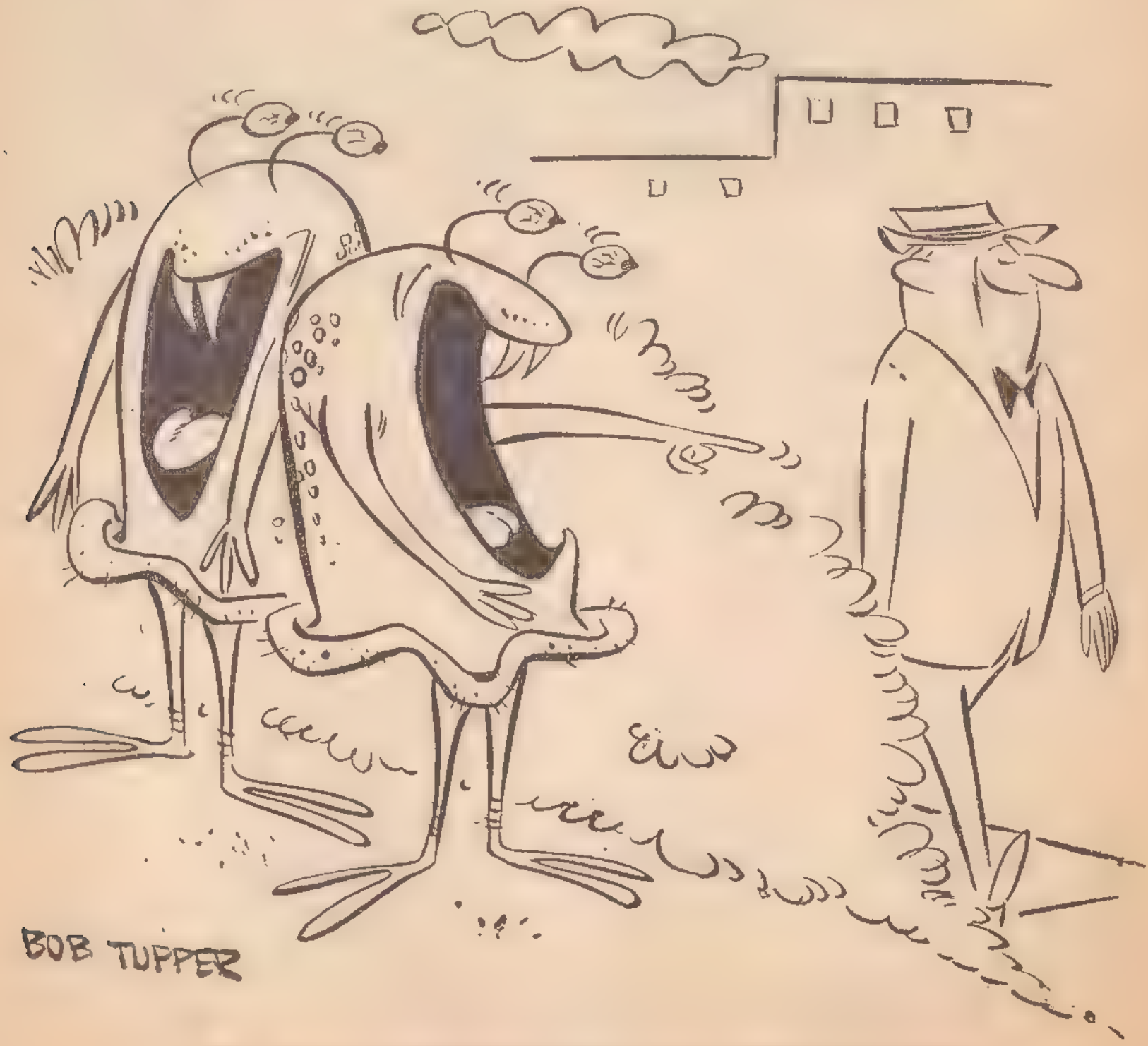
"I don't count," the dying captain said. "You'll be able to scratch me from the list soon." He frowned. "No Exec? No Navigator?" The Captain leaned back and closed his weary eyes for a moment, then opened them again. "It looks like it's up to you," he said. His veined, aged hand went up to his collar and removed the golden starcluster of his rank. He handed it to Peter.

"Carry on -- Captain Conroy."

He closed his eyes in death. Conroy stood up slowly, tears in his eyes, the golden cluster gripped tightly in his hand. The ship would continue on to Procyon now.

"I will, Grandfather. I will."

THE END



"Ho, ho, ho—remember when we looked like that?"

Why would strangers abduct an insane girl from a psychiatric ward? Jim Lawrence found out that to answer this question he had to face a—

Menace From Vega

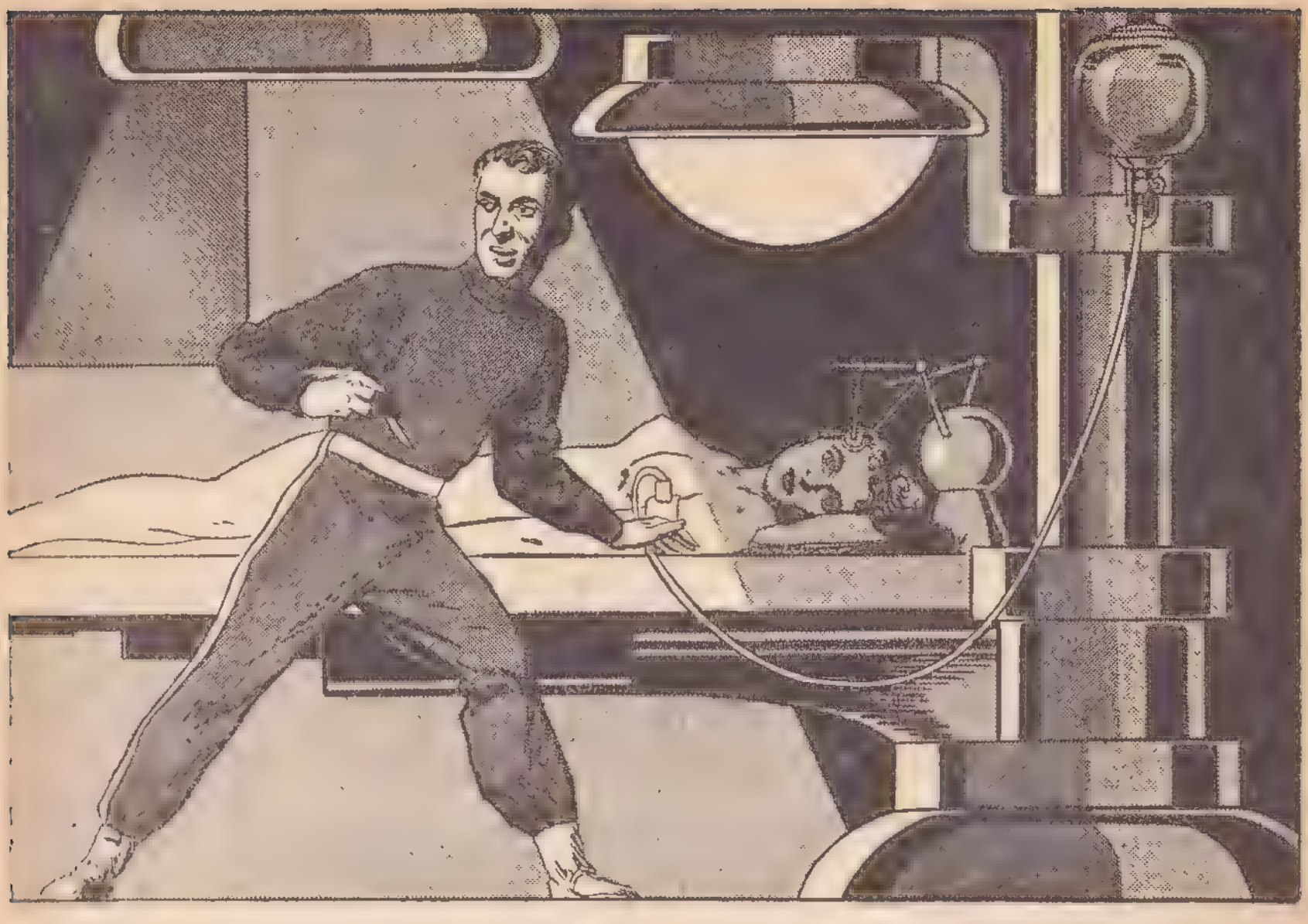
by

Robert Randall

THE TALL, DARKLY handsome man was grinning at Dr. James Lawrence from the wrong side of a gun.

"Don't do anything foolish," the stranger said.

The psychiatrist swallowed and looked at the muzzle of the weapon. The gun didn't look like any he had ever seen before, but he



had no doubt that it was deadly.

"What do you want?" he asked. He had never faced a gun before, but he found, oddly enough, that he wasn't at all frightened. There was simply a tense expectancy, a feeling of what's-coming-next? and no more.

"You have a patient at this hospital named Bette Bauer?" It was half a question, half a statement.

Jim Lawrence looked at the intruder without answering. He knew Bette Bauer - - a tall, beautiful brunette with deep grey-green eyes. There was nothing behind those eyes. She had been in St. Paul's Neuropsychiatric Hospital for three years - - a schizophrenic catatonic, completely out of touch with the real world.

"You're behaving childishly," said the man with the odd-looking gun, softly. "All I have to do is look through your files. Where is she?"

Lawrence shrugged. "Ward 3, Room 41. Why do you want to know?" He glanced at the clock on the wall. It was nearly midnight.

"It doesn't matter," the stranger said. "Come along. Lead us to where she is confined."

Outside the office, there were four men. They held their hands

in their pockets as though there were guns there. Lawrence glanced from one to another. They all looked somewhat alike, all with that same dark slimness and hardness of feature.

"What do you want?" Lawrence demanded.

"Just take us to Bette Bauer," the leader said. "If you do not, you will be shot." He smiled.

It was the sight of that smile that made Jim Lawrence realize the cold dangerousness of the man.

"Very well," Jim said. "Come this way."

As he led them down the hall toward Ward 3, Jim wondered about these men. What interest could they have in Bette Bauer? She had once been a brilliant physicist, and had shown signs of actual genius. But something had happened to her shortly after she had received her doctor's degree in theoretical physics. Her mind had become unbalanced, and she had been committed to St. Paul's Hospital.

As Chief Psychiatrist, Dr. James Lawrence had worked with her regularly; he was deeply interested in the girl. But he had been completely unable to break the dazed, trancelike state that she had been in for the past three years.

What did these five men want with her? And who *were* they, anyway? There was something odd about them, even aside from the peculiar gun that the leader carried. Their clothes seemed wrong, as though they weren't used to wearing them; their speech was strange in some undefinable way.

When they reached Ward 3, Jim Lawrence took the keys from his pocket and unlocked the main door. A night nurse at the desk looked up and smiled.

"Good evening, Dr. Lawrence," she said sweetly. Then she saw the men behind him, and her eyebrows lifted.

"We want to see Bette Bauer," Jim said, keeping his voice even.

"Certainly, Doctor." She led the way down the corridor to Room 41. It was a padded cell; with Dr. Bette Bauer, naked to prevent her from harming herself with her clothing, lying on the floor, crooning mindlessly, her grey-green eyes staring out into nothingness.

The dark man said, "That's her. Pick her up."

As the four silent followers moved forward, Jim saw that the leader was watching them - - he had taken his eyes off Jim himself.

Lawrence reached out and made a grab for the gun - - but the dark man was a move ahead of him. He moved away smoothly, whirled, and brought the gun down stunningly on Jim's head.

Jim threw a wild, wobbly punch at the man, and then the other four moved in on him. He fought back blindly for a few moments, but then a fist raked across his jaw, another smashed into his stomach, and the gun descended a second time. It caught him on the side of the head, and he sagged to the floor.

The thick padding was the last thing he felt before he blacked out.

THE PAIN OF AWAKENING was worse than the pain of the blow. Jim's head throbbed as though there were a motorcycle engine inside it.

When he opened his eyes, the pain became worse. A brilliant light was shining directly into his eyes. He winced and closed them again.

"Dim the light," said a softly slurred voice.

Jim opened his eyes again. This time, he saw what was standing over him, and he recoiled in horror.

The being looked vaguely reptilian, but there was a touch of the insect about it, too. It was green in color and covered with scales, like a fish. It stood on two legs, towering above him and gazing at him with bulging, faceted, insect-like eyes.

After the initial reaction of disgust came another thought: *I've got to get out of here!*

He rose to a sitting position, swung out with a fist. But the creature ducked lithely away from the blow. Cold hands on his shoulders pressed him down again, and he knew it was futile to attempt to fight his way out. He closed his eyes again - - hard.

"You are afraid of us," said the soft voice. "You fear me because of my appearance. Please do not. I — we — mean you no harm, Dr. Lawrence."

The thing was calling him by his own name. Lawrence shook his head to get the cobwebs out of it. What was going on?

It had been an ordinary, peaceful day. Then, five hoodlums kidnapping Bette Bauer, and that blow on the head - -

And now this. Reptilian creatures with glittering eyes. Lawrence opened his eyes again. The scene remained the same - - but this time he could see three similar creatures in the background.

"Who — what are you?"

And then, as he saw more of his surroundings, he asked, "Where is this?"

The alien said: "You are aboard our spaceship, Dr. Lawrence. We are following the Vegan ship."

In spite of the alien's terrifying

appearance, Jim sensed a curious friendliness in its voice. "I'm — I'm afraid I don't understand. Those men — "

The lizard-like being with the insect eyes sat down on a chair near the bunk. "Dr. Lawrence, I am Nestiv Illon. I am the captain of this ship, which is a war vessel in the Stellar Navy of Viagon.

"We are following the ship of Andsu Meero, the being who has kidnapped your Dr. Bette Bauer. We — "

Jim sat up in the bunk. "Just a minute," he said, holding up a hand. "I may be having a nightmare, but I still like to be sure of what's going on. The last I remember, I was trying to keep a bunch of gangsters from kidnapping one of my patients. Now I find myself here. Suppose you start from the beginning — "

"I see," the alien said. "I did not realize you were so unfamiliar with the situation. Those men who took the girl were working for Andsu Meero. He is attempting to gain control of the entire galaxy - - a goal at which," the alien said, its voice dropping sadly, "at which he is unfortunately succeeding."

Lawrence blinked. "How?"

"His race is telepathic to a certain extent. They can read the minds of most other races, although they cannot read each other's minds."

"These are the Vegans?" Lawrence asked, trying to keep the story assembled into a coherent pattern.

"Yes. They are the Vegans - - a warlike people who are now trying to overthrow the galactic government. Three years ago, Meero contacted the mind of a brilliant young Earth girl who had discovered a weapon of great significance - - a death ray, to be precise."

"You mean Bette Bauer?"

"That was the girl's name. Meero discovered her shortly before we did. My race is telepathic too. We found that Dr. Bauer had discovered a system of mass annihilation that would enable any group to take over the galaxy - - but Meero had her first. He focussed a mind-static generator on her and drove her insane. Naturally, he wanted the secret, so he came here to Earth to get it, as soon as he decided it was safe. By that time we, too, had found Earth, and followed."

"Only Meero had already grabbed the girl," Lawrence said.

"Exactly. We were too late. And now you understand the situation."

"Ah - - yes," Lawrence said uneasily. "All but one thing. Why did you drag *me* into this?"

The alien paused for a moment and said, "We found you unconscious and decided to take you into protective custody."

"But why? The Vegans have no use for me."

"No," Nestiv Illon said gently. "But we do."

ANOTHER OF THE reptilian beings approached at that moment and inclined its head toward Illon.

"What is it?"

"We're approaching Vega IX, sir."

"Very good," Illon said. "Shift into transparency-warp and go into orbit."

"Yes, sir." The subordinate inclined his head once again and backed away. Illon turned to Jim Lawrence.

"We are within striking range of the Vegan home base now. Here's where you come in."

"What do you mean?" Lawrence asked.

The alien rose. "It is impossible, of course, for any of us to enter the Vegan base, since no disguise will conceal our fundamental physical appearance. But you - - you are of the same general somatic type as the Vegans. A little eyeshadow, a bit of plastotek applied here and there to change the facial contours, and I think you could pass."

"You want me to slip into the Vegan base and rescue the girl? Is that it?"

"Yes," Illon said.

"All very nice - - but then what? Do I hand the death-ray over to you and let you conquer the galaxy? No, thanks; I might as well let the Vegans do it."

Illon shook his head sadly. "We have no such plans, Jim Lawrence. We are only concerned with keeping the annihilating ray out of the hands of the Vegans, with placing it in the sane custody such a deadly weapon deserves."

"How can I trust you?"

"It will be necessary, I'm afraid. You must believe that we plan no aggression of our own. No - - there *is* a way to prove it to you." He leaned down and spoke rapidly into a microphone.

A few moments later an alien appeared, bearing a gleaming chromium helmet. He handed it silently to Lawrence, who examined it curiously.

"What's this?"

"Put it on," Illon said softly.

"How do I know it's safe?"

"You have my word it's safe."

Suspiciously, Lawrence lifted the helmet and placed it on his head, where it fit snugly. A stream of images filtered abruptly through his mind.

The helmet was - - a history book. It was a thought-record that stretched back over centuries, over millenia, detailing the eon-old conflict between the Vegans and Nestiv Illon's people. As the story unfolded, Lawrence could see the cold malevolence of the Vegans opposed to the wise, kind people of Viagon. Through a pattern of cosmic conflicts and world-destroying wars, Lawrence grasped the history of the two peoples. Vega had been threatening to extend its empire throughout the universe, but had been checked at every point by the Viagoni, the guardians of civilization.

Finally, Lawrence removed the helmet. It seemed that he had lived through the history-record for hours, but a glance at his watch told him that no more than a few seconds had passed.

Nestiv Illon was staring patiently at him. "Well?"

Lawrence smiled. "I'm with you," he said.

THE SMALL SCOUTSHIP slipped easily through the hatch of the Viagoni cruiser and spiralled down into the atmosphere of Vega IX. Aboard, Jim Lawrence rocked in his deceleration cradle and tried to form a strategy for landing.

By the time the Viagoni medics had finished with him, he was the very image of a Vegan - - thin and dark, sinister-looking, tight-faced. That might get him *into* the Vegan base - - but how was he going to get out?

He shrugged his shoulders. *I'll worry about that when the time comes,* he told himself. Now, he waited while the remote-controlled scoutship brought him closer and closer to the planet below.

Finally it dropped to the ground. He stepped out and found himself in the midst of a vast, bleak plain. About a half-mile to the east, a cluster of little buildings was evident - - the upper portions, Illon had told him, of the fortified underground Vegan base.

He crossed the plain at a quick trot and slipped into a group of silent Vegans who were coming out of one of the above-surface buildings and heading toward a shaft that apparently led downward into the base. They were clad in overalls, and looked like workers. None of them spoke to him as he joined their ranks.

He moved along down into the shaft with them. A fantastic underground world opened before his eyes.

Great lights overhead cast illumination on the scene. Buildings reared up ten, fifteen, twenty stories; massive machines pumped

pistons back and forth, booming noisily. It was a gigantic base, a center for the conquest of the universe.

And somewhere in the heart of all this - - somewhere was Andsu Meero and the mindless body of Bette Bauer. If Meero had the chance to restore the girl's mind and drain from her the secret of the annihilating ray - -

But he didn't want to think about that. He kept going with the group of workers he had fallen in with, and found that they were marching toward a squat, windowless building that was the center of a good deal of activity.

The Vegans he was with were silent men, dark-faced and taciturn, and he was thankful for that. There was none of the genial camaraderie that might have been present between a bunch of Earthmen in a similiar position. He followed them into the building, and discovered that it was a tool dispensary of some kind. Each man was marching up to a closet and taking forth something that looked like a large, heavy brush.

Jim dropped back toward the end of the line and chewed at his lip. No doubt the tools would be apportioned one for each man in the squad, which meant they would be short one. And he didn't want the men he was with to suspect anything; he wanted to stay with them at least until he had formulated a more definite plan of action.

He lingered at the back of the line, looking around. There was no one behind him. He reached out for the man just in front of him and whacked him across the throat with the edge of his hand.

The man coughed and retched, and Lawrence clamped a hand over his mouth to silence him. Another quick blow and the Vegan dropped. Quietly, Lawrence dragged him away and deposited him in a closet nearby.

Then he returned to the line. Now there would be one broom for each man, no more.

WHEN EVERYONE was supplied, they marched solemnly back out the door of the supply-room. Obediently, Lawrence followed along. No one seemed to notice that a man was missing or that there was a stranger in the group.

They marched to the middle of the plaza, and there the first man in the group bent and pried off a manhole. Then the Vegans began disappearing even further into the earth. Tunnels within tunnels!

His turn came and he followed on down into the tunnel. For the first time, one of the Vegans spoke,

barking a short instruction in a harsh, guttural language.

Lawrence heard the sound of air blowing through pipes, then the sound of machinery grinding, then the slow whistle of the air-flow ceasing. He realized where he was and what the crew was about to do, and his heart surged. He had a plan, now.

He was in one of the air-shafts that fed the great subterranean Vagan base. The air had just been shut off in this particular tube. and the crew of Vegans he had joined was about to set to work scrubbing the tube, ridding it of any impurities that might have accumulated.

Now he knew what to do. As he scrubbed merrily through the shining length of the tube, he began to form his strategy.

It involved getting out of the tube, for one thing, and getting to a medical office, if they had any such thing in the base. That was the first step.

He counted to ten, then threw his broom in the air and uttered a piercing shriek. Then he fell to the ground, panting and gasping, and lay there flat against the cold metal of the airshaft.

Instantly his co-workers gathered around him. Twenty dark, unfriendly faces peered down, and they began to gabble something in their language that probably was the equivalent of "What's the matter with you?"

He lolled his head from side to side as if to indicate that he had suffered a stroke of some kind and couldn't speak. Drawing on his psychiatric experience, Lawrence offered a good imitation of a catatonic seizure, so convincing that before long he himself had burst out in a cold sweat as he lay rigid there.

Another Vegan came over - - evidently a superior - - and rattled out a quick command.

Immediately, two of the broom-workers put down their tools and hoisted Lawrence between them. They began to march back through the airshaft with him, up and out into the plaza again. They carried him into a tall, gleaming building which was presumably the medical office.

He allowed one corner of his lip to curl upward in a smile of satisfaction. So far, so good.

TWO DOCTORS were in attendance. They studied him closely, tapped him, prodded him, and held long colloquies with each other. After a few minutes of this, one of them disappeared into the adjoining room of the medical office, apparently to prepare some sort of test.

The other Vegan doctor took a few steps back and consulted a bulky red-bound volume on his desk. Apparently he'd never seen a seizure like this before.

With one bound Lawrence was off the bed and at the doctor's side. He whirled him around, smashed a fist into the medic's lean jaw, another into his stomach.

From behind him came a shout of surprise, as the other doctor returned to the room. Quickly, Lawrence scooped the unconscious doctor up and hurled him at the other. They both went down in a shower of crashing glasswork, and Lawrence sprang on top of them. Three solid punches did the job.

He hastily ripped strips from the bed and bound them securely. Then he began to prowl through the drug cabinet.

It wasn't easy, trying to read the labels in the alien language, but James Lawrence was skilled in the handling of drugs, and before long he had found what he wanted despite his inability to read the labels.

It was a pain-killing drug, one that was in use on Earth as well as Vega. He could tell by the familiar sugary taste of the white powder that this was the stuff.

Humming softly to himself, he slipped the bottle under his overalls, waved farewell to the sleeping doctors, and ducked out the door.

Five minutes later, he was back in the airshaft, wielding his broom energetically. He forged on to the front of the group, heading further and further along in the airshaft, until finally he came to the place he was looking for - - the tube that led to the heart of the air supply.

He looked around. No one was watching. He pushed open the door to the tube and slid quietly inside, trotting lightly until he reached the central pump.

"Sweet dreams," he said thoughtfully, as he inverted the bottle of the drug into the feeder that led to the pump. With that stuff filtering through the air, the whole base would be out like a light within an hour or so. There was enough knockout-potential in a bottle of that stuff, he thought, to keep everyone under wraps long enough for him to find Bette Bauer and get the blazes out of here.

GETTING OUT was a harder job. It involved threading his way through the maze of airshafts once again, getting past the swabbing-crew, and out into the open. But he made it. By now the air was beginning to smell sweet, and he knew the drug was taking effect.

The problem now was to locate Meero. But that proved to be simple. Lawrence headed across the plaza toward the pair of great buildings that seemed to be the administrative sections of the base, and stopped the first Vegan he saw.

"Andsu Meero?" he asked.

The Vegan looked blankly at him.

"*Andsu Meero*," Lawrence repeated, with great urgency.

The Vegan pointed to the building on the left and uttered a stream of words. Lawrence smiled politely and headed toward the left-hand building.

After he had gone about half the distance, he noticed the increase in the sweetness in the air. He stopped, ripped off his shirt, and wrapped it over his mouth and nose. That would be ample protection.

By the time he reached the building, the guards posted outside were safely asleep. He seized one of the strange pistols from them, and entered.

Where to find Meero and the girl, he wondered. Vegans were sagging into sleep all over the lobby of the building. Shrugging his shoulders, he decided there was only one way. He would have to look in every room of the immense building.

But he didn't have far to look. After about ten minutes' search of the slumber-wrapped building, he stepped into an ornate, impressive-looking building, and found Meero.

Awake.

The thin Vegan whirled in astonishment as Lawrence entered. He was at the back of the room, bending over the nude form of Bette Bauer. Lawrence noticed a strange odor in the room, even through his improvised face-mask - - and it wasn't the odor of the drug he'd slipped into the air system.

Angrily, Andsu Meero ripped out a barking sentence in Vegan. Then his eyes narrowed. "Oh, the Earthman? How did *you* get in here?"

Lawrence's pistol rose. "Get away from that girl, Meero. Get away or I'll shoot you."

"Just try," Meero chuckled. He calmly drew his own gun from its holster, and Lawrence realized with a shock that he was as good as unarmed, because he did not know how to use the Vegan gun!

He hurled the useless gun at Meero and dove behind a chair just as the Vegan's pistol fired. A section of the wall caved in. Lawrence peered out, then ducked back as he saw Meero looking for him.

Cautiously, he began to thread his way along the side of the room

toward Meero.

"Don't move, Earthman," Meero said coldly. "I see you."

"But you don't see me!" cried a new voice. Surprised, the alien turned, and in that moment Lawrence sprang and hit him with all he had. The gun went flying from the Vegan's hands. He struck back, but Lawrence parried the blow and smashed his fists into Meero's face. The alien rolled over and lay still.

Lawrence glanced up at Bette Bauer, who had spoken.

"You saved my life," he said.

"And you mine." She reddened, and snatched a drape from the wall to cover her nakedness. "Meero was just about to drain my mind for - - " She paused.

"I know what for," Lawrence said. "I know the whole thing." He glanced around. "I might have known," he said. "Meero was using some kind of drug on you, wasn't he?"

She nodded.

"There's time for explanation later," Lawrence said. "The Viagoni are waiting for us, to take us back to Earth and to safety."

"What about Meero?"

"He'll go with all the rest of them," Lawrence said. "When we've built your annihilator, and when we've wiped out this cancer spot of the universe. Let's go."

He took her by the hand, and they raced through the sleeping Vegan base to the waiting Viagoni ship.

". . . nice old boy . . . nice old Martian sand lizard . . ."

PRISONER OF WAR

by

Randall Garrett

It was the first time a Flesso had met an Earthman face to face. And the Flesso appeared puzzled as to why the Earthman showed no fear!

MARTEN WASN'T PREPARED for it when the alien tractor-beam grabbed his little ship. He had been in the Fourth Quadrant of Fless territory, threading an uneasy course through the extraterrestrials' home grounds, but he hadn't expected to be caught so suddenly or so hard.

The ship stopped in mid-flight abruptly -- so abruptly that Marten's head was slammed back against the rear of the seat, and for a moment he was paralyzed by the shock of what had happened.

But only for a moment. His toe reached out, snapped the pedal on the subspace radio, and an instant later the voice of Earth Central's operator said, "What is it, Marten?"

"Tell them I've been caught," Marten said crisply. "Tell 'em the Flesso patrols got me. And --"

The radio went dead as the Flesso dampers got to it. Marten pulled himself forward and ran his eyes over the instrument panel. Against the dark velvet of space, a dull-gray Flesso warship was swelling in the viewplate, preparing to scoop up its prey. Marten had been caught like a fly in molasses.

The odds had been against his stunt anyway. Theoretically, such a small ship as the little scout he was piloting should have been able to get through the Flesso patrols easily -- but in practice, the network of spybeams stretching through the entire Quadrant were efficient and near-infallible defenses, as Marten was discovering now.

But I had lousy luck too, he thought. *I wandered right up to*

the biggest warship in the whole damned fleet. Must have come within a light week or less.

There wasn't much point in trying to break away, now. Marten was trapped - - thoroughly and unarguably. The little scout ship didn't carry a tenth the power he would need to break from the grasp of the big battle cruiser. And as for the scout ship's armament, it wasn't enough even to tickle the screens of a battleship like this one. Scout ships depended on speed and indetectability, and neither attribute was of much value now.

Within minutes, the heavy tractor beams pulled the smaller ship into the yawning airlock of the huge Flesso cruiser.

Okay, Marten thought. He folded his arms, leaned back in his chair, and waited. There was nothing else he could do - - until a Fless tried to enter the ship.

TIME PASSED. The little scoutship was drawn further and further into the monster Flesso ship. It was now entirely enclosed by darkness, imprisoned within the metal hull of the huge battleship of space.

Sitting inside, Marten waited patiently. The Flesso had been wanting to capture an Earthman for a long time. Well, now they'd succeeded. They'd captured their first Earth ship.

Suddenly, Marten's damped communicator screen came back to life. A scaly, toadlike face appeared, and Marten stared blandly at the three red-rimmed, fiery eyes that confronted him.

"I see you are still alive, Earthman!"

"No thanks to you, ugly-face!" Marten returned. "I'm hungry, though. Am I going to stay for dinner, or can I leave now?"

Earth and Fless had long been in communication with each other; the war had lasted for nearly five years, ever since the first treacherous Flesso sneak attack on a Terran outpost. The beings from the planet Fless were the coldest, most dangerous aliens Earth had yet encountered in its expansion to the stars.

During the war, neither side had succeeded in capturing one of the other's men alive. The ravening energies of a billion-cycle space gun tore a ship completely apart, leaving no survivors. But now Marten had been captured -- and he was determined to make the most of it.

"Keep your tongue!" the toad-faced Fless snarled. "Do you know who I am?"

"Santa Claus? Uncle Sam? The Wicked Witch of the North?"

The alien's face radiated hatred. "I am Ghuvekenkh-Nathor!"

Marten whistled. Ghuvek, eh? He had really stumbled into a good one, then. Ghuvek was the leader of the Flesso legions!

"Hello, Ghuvek. The pleasure is all mine. Do I *have* to keep looking at your face?"

"You will surrender or die," Ghuvek said, ignoring the barb.

Marten chuckled. "Okay. Come and get me, ugly!" He reached out and snapped off the communicator decisively.

Without waiting to see what would happen next, he sprang from the control seat. The Flesso were going to expect to find him inside the little scout ship. Very well, Marten thought. That's the one place I *won't* be.

Smiling grimly, he strapped on a pair of bulky Spaulding cutter-pistols, and headed for the escape hatch. The aliens, he knew, would be watching the main airlock -- they wouldn't be expecting a second exit, and, if they were,

they wouldn't know exactly where it would be.

Silently, Marten dropped through the hatch at the rear of the ship. *Come and get me,* he thought. *I'm ready.*

HE FOUND HIMSELF in a large metal room that measured well over a hundred feet in width and twice that in length. The ceiling, dimly-seen, was far overhead, beyond any quick estimation.

Crouching in the shadow of his ship, Marten watched a platoon of the loathsome Flesso bring a heavy, semi-portable burner up to the airlock. The reptilian aliens were having quite a time with the weapon; there was much hissing and flicking of tails as they got it in position.

Finally, they managed to train the muzzle on the door, and then pressed the firing studs. A dazzling blue-white glare leaped toward the airlock door.

Lovely, Marten thought, as the bright light cast fierce illumination in the giant room. An instant after the burner went into action, so did Marten. He drew his Spauldings and fired.

One -- two -- three -- four--

Four quick, silent spurts of flame, and four of the aliens lay dead, charred through by the noiseless, almost invisible energy of the Spauldings. The unfortunate aliens had had no way of knowing where it had come from, that death that had hit four of their number in as many seconds. The burst of light from the semi-portable burner had blanketed every trace of the faint radiation from Marten's pistols.

Huddling low, Marten ran for a nearby girder, taking advantage of the fact that the aliens' attentions were still directed toward the airlock of his ship. Naturally, they wouldn't notice a figure running from the rear.

He took a position behind the girder and, aiming carefully, picked off four more of the aliens. He tried to put his shot just back of the oversized, toad-like heads of the Flesso, though it didn't matter much where the beam landed. The result was the same.

The survivors were conferring hissingly and evincing great confusion. Apparently they still thought the fire was coming from somewhere within the ship, but they were unable to figure out where.

There were eight of them left. Marten picked off one of them with his ninth charge, then held fire. He had one charge left, and then there would be a thirty-second delay while the Spauldings recharged themselves. He didn't want to leave himself defenseless

even for thirty seconds.

He counted off. Ten, fifteen, twenty -- one gun was charged. He raised it, readied to fire, when he heard a sudden tell-tale hiss from behind him.

He whirled, but it was too late. A searing beam of energy cracked into him, hurling him backward. He clung to consciousness an instant, then blacked out as the beam shorted his neural circuits.

WHEN HE AWOKE, Marten opened his eyes, blinked, closed them again.

"Ugh," he said.

He felt a savage poke in the stomach. *"Open your eyes!"*

"Do I have to?"

"Open them!"

With visible reluctance, he opened his lids and stared into the bulging, lidless eyes of none other than Ghuvek enkh-Nathor himself.

The Flesso leader was even uglier than usual. "Very clever, Earthman," he said coldly. "For that little trick, you'll die -- slowly. After we have extracted all the information we need from you, that is."

"Trick?" asked Marten blankly.

"Yes. Getting out of the ship and shooting down my men."

"Dear me," Marten said innocently. "I thought that was the smart thing to do, in view of your hostile attitude. I didn't realize you'd be so stuffy about it, but I'm sorry that you're so stupid you --"

"Silence!"

A heavy, clawed hand smashed across his face, slamming his head to one side. The enraged alien leader turned to a henchman at his side. "Get the brainprobe, Captain Yknor."

"At once, Commander."

The captain waddled over to an elaborate-looking machine near the wall, and removed its translucent hood. Marten looked at it, and almost gasped. The thing was so much like the Terran model of a brainprobe that only a practiced eye could tell them apart.

Obviously, this machine worked on the same principle as the Earth-type brainprobe did. And that, Marten reflected, was not a pleasant thought.

"You use that for picking your teeth, Ghuvek?"

"You'll find out its use soon enough, Earthman." The Flesso scowled and signalled to the captain to wheel the brainprobe over.

No organic brain, Marten knew, could stand up against the mental energies of a brainprobe. Within seconds, it could render any person a slave to the will of whoever operated the machine. Marten clenched his jaws grimly, ready to resist any-

thing the Flesso could throw against him. There was always a chance that --

"Your mouth will be less full of insults when we have finished with you, Earthman."

"You're scaring me, Ghuvek."

"We'll see. Clamp down the helmet."

The cold metal descended and the Captain anchored it tightly around Marten's skull.

"What shall I ask first, Most Noble Sire?" Captain Yknor asked.

Ghuvek enkh-Nathor smiled harshly. "I am interested in knowing how it was that he deflected the death-dealing beam that shot him down. It should have killed him -- but it merely knocked him out. Ask the prisoner what protection he has."

Yknor threw a switch, and a low buzzing hum throbbed in the room as the brainprobe's generators went to work. Marten felt a faint tingling in his skull. Then Yknor turned a dial, and the probe sank into his brain.

HE HELD HIS BREATH as the energy projectors of the brainprobe wandered around in his skull, seeking to gain hold. They failed. The Flesso model wasn't attuned to Earth minds, apparently.

"Why didn't the energy beam kill you?" Captain Yknor asked.

"Because it missed me," said Marten calmly.

A grin spread across Ghuvek's evil, toadish face.

"Good!" he said exultantly. "It missed him -- but now we know that the Earthmen have no defense against our weapons." He rubbed his dry, scaly hands together.

"The next question, Sire?"

"Make him tell us about the defenses of Earth," Ghuvek said.

"I'll be damned if I will, you bloated monstrosity."

Ghuvek's globular eyes blinked slowly in surprise. "But -- you're supposed to be under the power of the machine!" He turned his flat, batrachian head to glare at Captain Yknor. "Turn up the power!"

"Yes, Sire."

Yknor's thick claws wrenched up the dial and a surge of power thundered through Marten's brain without leaving an impression.

"Feels nice," he said. "Like an extra-special shampoo. But you wouldn't know what a shampoo is, would you?"

"Up higher!" Ghuvek snapped.

"That's as high as it goes, Sire."

Marten still sat there, sneering openly at the alien's attempts to read his brain. Ghuvek paced angrily around the seated Earthman without speaking.

"All right," he said finally. "Shut the machine off. Obviously,

the Earthman's brain just does not respond." There was anger and more than a touch of surprise in his voice. "Take the brainprobe away."

"Yes, Sire."

Ghuvek's eyes grew hard. "There are, however, older and cruder ways. What do you say to torture, eh, Earthman?"

"I'm not much in favor of it," said Marten. "I can't say I care for the idea at all."

"Good," Ghuvek said. "Yknor, prepare the torture!"

No human being likes physical torture. The idea of having hot needles slid under one's fingernails, of having one's toenails removed by pincers, of being scourged with nerve-whips -- none of these were pleasant thoughts.

Not pleasant, perhaps, but not unbearable, so far as Marten was concerned. It hurt; of course it hurt. But not once during the terrible ordeal did Marten either pass out or give any sign that the torture was more than he could bear.

"What's the matter, Ghuvek? Slowing down?"

At each taunt, the alien overlord grew uglier and angrier. And as the horror went on, Ghuvek seemed to come more and more frantic. None of the most delicate subtle torture devised -- and the Flesso were experts at devising torture -- seemed to have any effect on the Earthman. He simply sat there, grimly, stoically.

"You're boring me, Ghuvek," Marten remarked as an acidtipped auger nibbled flesh from his chest. "But I'm willing to be cooperative. You'll notice I'm just sitting here patiently while you play with me."

"Very well!" Ghuvek stormed. "If that's your attitude, we'll see what can be done! Perhaps you Earthmen have no pain nerves -- but at the sight of your very bodies being destroyed --"

"I think I've had about enough of this," Marten said. Flexing his muscles, he yanked one hand free of the torture-chair and ripped the auger from his chest.

He hurled the acid-tipped drill far across the room, where it smashed against the wall. Then he pulled his other arm free and, with one final straining effort, rose from the chair and stood unbound.

"What?" Ghuvek's half-whispered question was almost impossible to hear. "You're *free*?" Captain Yknor opened his bluging eyes even wider and flattened himself against the wall, while Ghuvek gasped in terror.

"I'm free," Marten said. "I got tired of having you play with me."

He smiled cheerfully -- and then sprang into life as one of the pro-

jectors that lined the wall, manned by guards outside, moved just a fraction of an inch. A burst of energy from one of those projectors could kill him -- but it would kill anyone or anything else.

He leaped on Ghuvek. He sensed the acrid, nauseating odor of the alien, and wrapped his legs around the Flesso's body, pitching them both to the ground. The two of them rolled over against the far wall.

A quick glance told Marten that the projectors in the walls were following, but they couldn't shoot for fear of hitting Ghuvek.

The Flesso leader squirmed in Marten's grip as he tried to get his ray pistol out of its holster.

"No you don't!" Marten said, and grabbed the alien's arm. Ghuvek grunted as Marten bent the arm upward and twisted until the ligaments creaked.

"No!" Ghuvek moaned.

"Drop the gun, then."

The alien squirmed again. Marten twisted upward and there was a sharp *crack* -- followed by another, the sound of the gun hitting the floor. Then something slammed against Marten's head from behind.

JERKING HIS HEAD aside, he crashed his fist against Ghuvek's temple to knock him out and reduce the opposition. Again something struck his head. This time, Marten turned and grabbed a slimy wrist.

It was Captain Yknor, who had been trying to knock Marten out with the butt of his pistol. Marten twisted viciously at the captain's wrist, and the ray pistol clattered to the floor. Yknor screamed in agony as a burning pain raced up his arm, and swung wildly at Marten with his good arm.

The savage claws raked the air just above the Earthman's head, and he drove in with a solid punch that made Yknor gasp. Marten followed his advantage with a smash to the face, sent the alien reeling away in pain, and in the same motion reached down and grasped one of the fallen ray-pistols.

He stepped over to Ghuvek's limp body and jabbed the pistol into the alien leader's scaly side.

"All right," he said coldly. "Anything more, and I'll let Ghuvek enkh-Nathor have a fast burn through his guts!"

There was a stunned silence for a moment, then the pain-wracked voice of Captain Yknor said, "Don't shoot at the Earthman. Get away from those projectors!"

The projector crew held fire. Marten waited tensely as Ghuvek moaned and stirred. Ten feet away, standing amidst the torture implements, the captain clutched his broken arm and watched the Earth-

man with terror in his eyes and pain evident on his face.

Ghuvek blinked his eyes opened. He looked dazed for a moment, then focussed his eyes on Marten. His right arm, the Earthman noticed, was twisted horribly.

"Yknor?"

"He's over there," Marten said. "His arm didn't bend either. And if you move, I'll find out how resistant your innards are to a quick burn."

Ghuvek shook his head bewilderedly. "You've got us, Earthman. But -- how did it happen? How could one man take over a great battleship?"

"It was easy," Marten said.

Ghuvek moaned and looked at his mangled arm regretfully. "I don't understand," the defeated alien commander said.

"Why did you let us torture you if you could get away so easily?"

Marten smiled. "I wanted to teach you a lesson," he said. "Earth's been patient with your marauding for a long time, and we put up with your sneak attack on Regulus. But the time has come to tell you to stop -- or we'll wipe your whole race out of the Galaxy. We're tired of your tactics, Ghuvek. And if one man can do this to you, what can a whole army of us do?"

There was a long silence before Ghuvek spoke. And when he spoke, it was the voice of a being whose pride had been completely crushed. "If we had known," he said weakly, swallowing. "Who knew the Earthmen were supermen? You're the first we could capture -- and it was all a trick! You *let* us capture you, to show us what you could do."

"Very smart, Ghuvek. You learn quickly."

The alien passed one hand over his face. "We'll ... we'll call off our offensive at once."

"Good. Now I'll use your radio to call Earth and tell them you're on your way to arrange peace terms!"

AT EARTH MILITARY Headquarters, General James Bedford snapped off the subspace radio and grinned at the man who faced him across the table, Colonel Parnell.

"You hear that, Parnell? The trick worked! He got them so scared of Earthmen that they're ready to come to terms."

Colonel Parnell smiled. "Fine deal all around. It cost us ten billion dollars to build Military Advance Robot Number Ten, not counting what we spent on the first nine failures -- but it was worth it. We've saved untold numbers of lives."

The general nodded. "Well worth it. MAR-10 did the job perfectly."

THE END

"You catching cold?"

Come Into My Brain!

by

Alexander Blade

Fitted with the new thought-helmet, Dane Harrell plunged into the venomous brain of the alien. It was a fast way to commit suicide! . . .

DANE HARRELL held the thought-helmet tightly between his hands and, before putting it on, glanced over at the bound, writhing alien sitting opposite him. The alien snarled defiantly.

"You're sure you want to go through with this?" asked Dr. Phelps.

Harrell nodded. "I volunteered, didn't I? I said I'd take a look inside this buzzard's brain and I'm going to do it. If I don't come up in half an hour, come get me."

"Right."

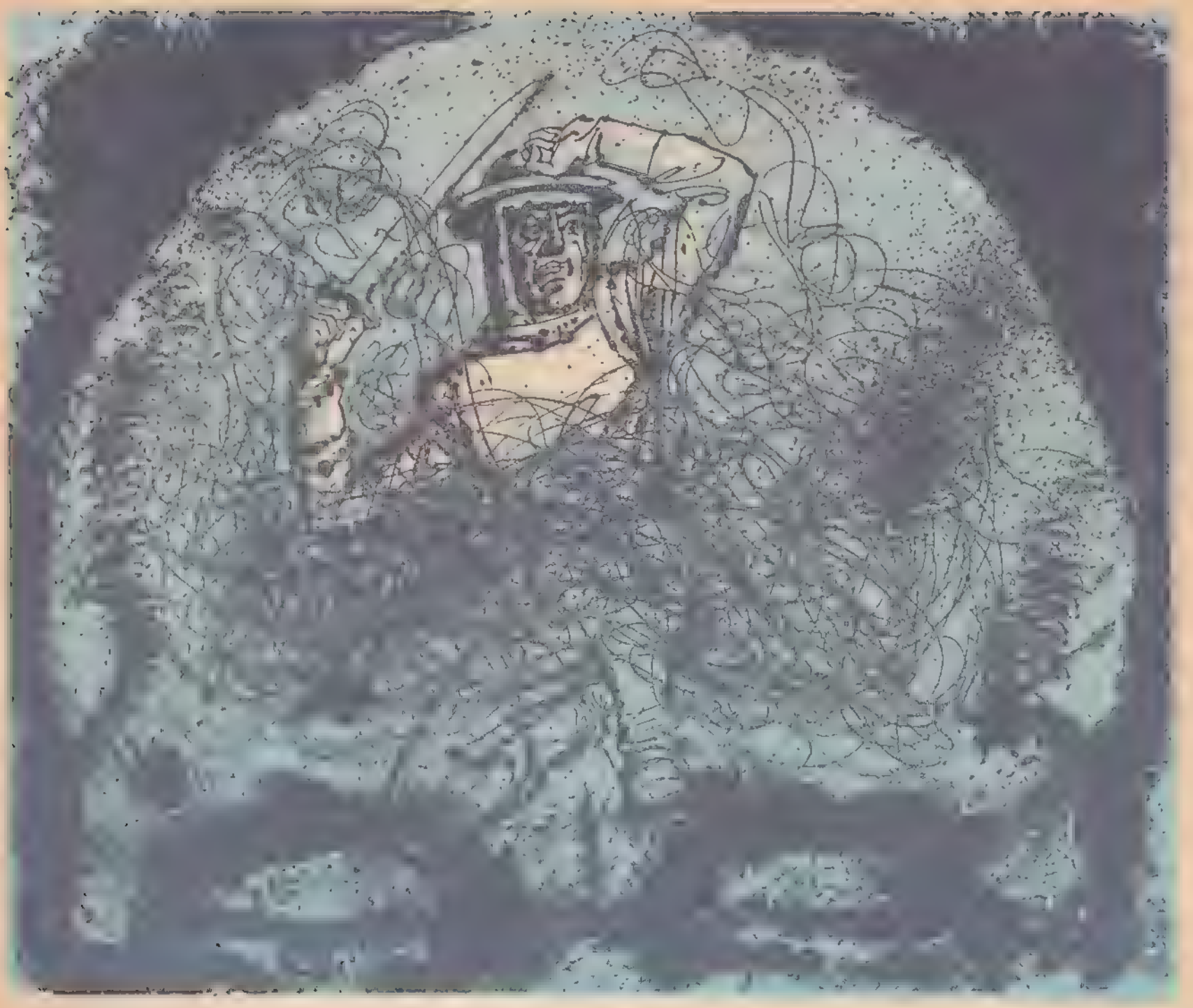
Harrell slipped the cool bulk of the thought-helmet over his head and signalled to the scientist, who pulled the actuator switch. Harrell shuddered as psionic current surged through him; he stiffened, wriggled, and felt himself glide out of his body, hover incorporeally in the air between his now soulless shell and the alien bound opposite.

Remember, you volunteered, he told himself.

He hung for a moment outside the alien's skull; then, he drifted downward and in. He had entered the alien's mind. Whether he would emerge alive, and with the troop-deployment data—well, that was another matter entirely.

The patrol-ships of the Terran outpost on Planetoid 113 had discovered the alien scout a week before. The Dimellian spy was lurking about the outermost reaches of the Terran safety zone when he was caught.

It wasn't often that Earth captured a Dimellian alive and so the Outpost resolved to comb as much information from him as possible. The Earth-Dimell war was four years old; neither side had scored a



decisive victory. It was believed that Dimell was massing its fleets for an all-out attack on Earth itself; confirmation of this from the captured scout would make Terran defensive tactics considerably more sound.

But the Dimellian resisted all forms of brainwashing until Phelps, the Base Psych-man, came forth with the experimental thought-helmet. Volunteers were requested; Harrell spoke up first. Now, wearing the thought-helmet, he plunged deep into the unknown areas of the Dimellian's mind, hoping to emerge with high-order military secrets.

His first impression was of thick grey murk—so thick it could be cut. Using a swimming motion, Harrell drifted downward, toward the light in the distance. It was a long way down; he floated, eerily, in free-fall.

Finally he touched ground. It yielded under him spongily, but it

was solid. He looked around. The place was alien: coarse crumbly red soil, giant spike-leaved trees that shot up hundreds of feet overhead, brutal-looking birds squawking and chattering in the low branches.

It looked just like the tridim solidos of Dimell he had seen. Well, why not? Why shouldn't the inside of a man's mind—or an alien's, for that matter—resemble his home world?

Cautiously, Harrell started to walk. Mountains rose in the dim distance and he could see, glittering on a mountaintop far beyond him, the white bulk of an armored castle. Of course! His imaginative mind realized at once that here was where the Dimellian guarded his precious secrets; up there, on the mountain, was his goal.

He started to walk.

Low-hanging vines obscured his way; he conjured up a machete and cut them down. The weapon felt firm and real in his hand but he realized that not even the hand was real; all this was but an imaginative projection.

The castle was further away than he had thought. He saw this after he had walked for perhaps 15 minutes. There was no telling duration inside the alien's skull, either. Or distance. The castle seemed just as distant now as when he had begun and his 15-minute journey through the jungle had tired him.

Suddenly demonic laughter sounded up ahead in the jungle. Harsh, ugly laughter.

And the Dimellian appeared, slashing his way through the vines with swashbuckling abandon.

"Get out of my mind, Earthman!"

THE DIMELLIAN was larger than life and twice as ugly. It was an idealized, self-glorified mental image Harrell faced.

The captured Dimellian was about five feet tall, thick-shouldered, with sturdy, corded arms and supplementary tentacles sprouting from its shoulders; its skin was green and leathery, dotted with toad-like warts.

Harrell now saw a creature close to nine feet tall, swaggering, with a mighty barrel of a chest and a huge broad-sword clutched in one of its arms. The tentacles writhed purposefully.

"You know why I'm here, alien. I want to know certain facts. And I'm not getting out of your mind until I've wrung them from you."

The alien's lipless mouth curved in a bleak smile. "Big words, little Earthman. But first you'll have to vanquish *me*."

And the Dimellian stepped forward.

Harrell met the downcrashing blow of the alien's broad-sword fully; the shock of impact sent numbing shivers up his arm as far as his shoulder but he held on and turned aside the blow. It wasn't fair; the Dimellian had a vaster reach than he could ever hope for . . .

No! He saw there was no reason why he couldn't control the size of his own mental image. Instantly he was 10 feet high and advancing remorselessly toward the alien.

Swords clashed clangorously; the forest-birds s c r e a m e d. Harrell drove the alien back . . . back . . .

And the Dimellian was eleven feet high.

"We can keep this up forever," Harrell said. "Getting larger and larger. This is only a mental conflict." He shot up until he again towered a foot above the alien's head. He swung downward two-handedly with the machete . . .

The alien vanished.

And reappeared five feet to the right, "Enough of this foolishness, Earthman. Physical conflict will be endless stalemate, since we're only mental projections. You're beaten; there's no possible way you can defeat me, or I defeat you. Don't waste your time and mine. Get out of my mind!"

Harrell shook his head doggedly. "I'm in here to do a job and I'm not leaving until I've done it." He sprang forward, sword high, and thrust down at the grinning Dimellian.

Again the Dimellian sidestepped. Harrell's sword cut air.

"Don't tire yourself out, Earthman," the alien said mockingly, and vanished.

Harrell stood alone in the heart of the steaming jungle, leaning on his sword. Maybe he was only a mental projection, he thought, but a mental projection could still get thoroughly drenched with its own mental sweat.

The castle still gleamed enigmatically on the distant mountain. He couldn't get there by walking —at least, it hadn't seemed to draw any nearer during his jaunt through the jungle. Hand-to-hand combat with the alien appeared fruitless. A fight in which both participants could change size at will, vanish, reappear, and do other such things was as pointless as a game of poker with every card wild.

But there had to be a way. Mental attack? Perhaps *that* would crumble the alien's defenses.

He sent out a beam of thought, directed up at the castle. *Can you hear me, alien?*

Mental laughter echoed mockingly back. *Of course, Earthman. What troubles you?*

Harrell made no reply. He stood silently, concentrating, marshalling his powers. Then he hurled a bolt of mental energy with all his strength toward the mocking voice.

The jungle shuddered as it struck home. The ground lurched wildly, like an animal's back; trees tumbled, the sky bent. Harrell saw he had scored a hit; the alien's concentration had wavered, distorting the scenery.

But there was quick recovery. Again the mocking laughter. Harrell knew that the alien had shrugged off the blow.

And then the counterblow.

It caught Harrell unawares and sent him spinning back a dozen feet, to land in a tangled heap beneath a dangling nest of vines. His head rocked, seemed ready to split apart. He sensed the alien readying a second offensive drive, and set up counterscreens.

This time he was ready. He diverted the attack easily, and shook his head to clear it. The score was even: one stunning blow apiece. But he had recovered and so had the ailen.

Harrell aimed another blow and felt the alien sweep it aside. Back came the answering barrage of mental force; Harrell blocked it.

Stalemate again, the alien said.

We're evenly matched, Harrell replied. *But I'll beat you.* He looked up at the far-off castle on the mountainside. *I'll beat you yet.*

That remains to be proven, troublesome Earthman.

HARRELL TRAMPED ON through the jungle of the alien's mind for a while, and then, realizing he was getting no closer to the all-important castle on the hill, stopped by a brook to wipe away his perspiration. It was hot on this accursed world—hot, muggy, dank.

He kneeled over the water's surface. It looked pure, cool. A sudden thought struck him and he ripped a strip from his shirt and dipped it in the water.

The plasticloth blackened and charred. He let it drop and the "water" quickly finished the job. Pool? No. Concentrated sulphuric acid or something just as destructive.

Smiling grimly at his narrow escape, he wiped his perspiration with another strip torn from his sleeve and kept going. Several hours, at least, had passed since he had entered the strange world within the alien's mind.

That meant one of two things:

either the time-scale in here was different from that outside or his half-hour limit had elapsed in the outer world and Dr. Phelps had been unsuccessful in bringing him back.

That was a nice thought. Suppose he was stuck here indefinitely, inside the mind of an alien being, in a muggy jungle full of sulphuric-acid brooks?

Well, he thought, *I asked for it . . .*

The stalemate couldn't continue indefinitely. If he had swallowed some of the acid that would have ended the contest without doubt; he wouldn't have had time to cope with the searing fluid.

The answer lay there — *surprise.* Both he and the alien were mental entities who could do battle as they pleased—but in this conflict it was necessary to take the opponent by surprise before he could counterthrust or vanish.

He began to see a solution.

Up ahead lay the castle—unreachable, through some trick of the alien's. Very well. Harrell's brows drew together in concentration for a moment; his mind planned a strategy—and formed men to carry it out.

There were six of him, suddenly.

SIX IDENTICAL HARRELLS —identical in size, shape, form, purpose. They would attack the Dimellian simultaneously. Or, at least, five of them would, creating a diversionary action while the sixth — Harrell-original — made a frontal assault on the castle.

Harrell-original faced his five duplicates and briefly instruoted each in his job. They were like puppets.

"Harrell-one, you're to attack in conjunction with Harrell-two, on the mental level. Take turns heaving mental bolts at the alien. While one of you is recharging, the other is to unload. That won't give him time to get any sort of defense organized and certainly no counter-attack.

"Harrell-three and Harrell-four, you're to attack physically, one armed with sword and one with blaster, from opposite sides at once. *That* ought to keep him busy, while he's fighting off the rest of you.

"Harrell-five, your job is to serve as front runner—to find the Dimellian and engage him in conversation while the other four are getting ready to attack. Make him angry; get him concerned about what you're saying. The instant his defenses drop the other four of you jump in. All of you got that?"

They nodded in unison.

"Good. Meanwhile I'll make an assault on the castle and maybe I can get through with you five running interference for me."

He dismissed them and they set out in different directions. He didn't want the Dimellian to find out what was up; if the alien saw the strategy and had time to create duplicates of its own the conflict would end in stalemate again.

Harrell waited, while his five duplicates went into action.

Through the mental link with Harrell-five, he listened as his duplicates said, "The time has come to finish you off, alien. I'm glad I found you. That acid trick almost got me but not quite."

"A pity," the alien replied. "I was hoping the ruse would finish you. It's becoming quite irritating, having you in here. You're starting to bore me."

"Just you wait, you overstuffed wart-hog. I'll have those tentacles of yours clipped soon enough."

"Empty words, Earthman. You've run out of strategies; your best course is to get out of my mind and forget this entire silly affair."

"Oh, no. I'll have those secrets pried out of you quicker than you think."

"How?"

"I'm not giving away *my* secrets, alien. I'm here after yours."

Harrell readied himself. He gave the signal: *now*.

Harrell-one and Harrell-three appeared. Harrell-one loosed a bombardment of mental force that shook the alien; Harrell-three dashed forward, wielding a machete.

Harrell-two and Harrell-four went into action, Harrell-two following up with a second mental bolt, Harrell-four firing a blaster. The bedeviled alien looked from side to side, not knowing where to defend himself first.

The scenery began to rock. The alien was going down.

Harrell took to the air.

Levitating easily above the jungle, he found the castle and zeroed in on it. As he dropped downward it changed—from a vaulting proud collection of spires and battlements to a blocky square building and from that into an armored box with a padlock.

The Dimellian stood before it, struggling with the five duplicate Harrells.

Harrell stepped past—*through*—the writhing group. The Dimellian's defenses were down. The secrets were unguarded.

He wrenched the padlock off with a contemptuous twist of his hand. The box sprang open. Inside lay documents, neatly typed, ready for

his eye.

The alien uttered a mighty howl. The forest dissolved; the universe swirled around Harrell's head.

HE WOKE. It seemed to be months later.

Dr. Phelps stood by his side.

Harrell took two or three deep breaths, clearing his head. He grinned. "I've got them," he said. "Information on troop movements, plan of battle, even the line of journey across space."

"Good work," the psychman said. "I was worried at first. You had some expressions of real terror on your face when you put the helmet on."

"Dead?"

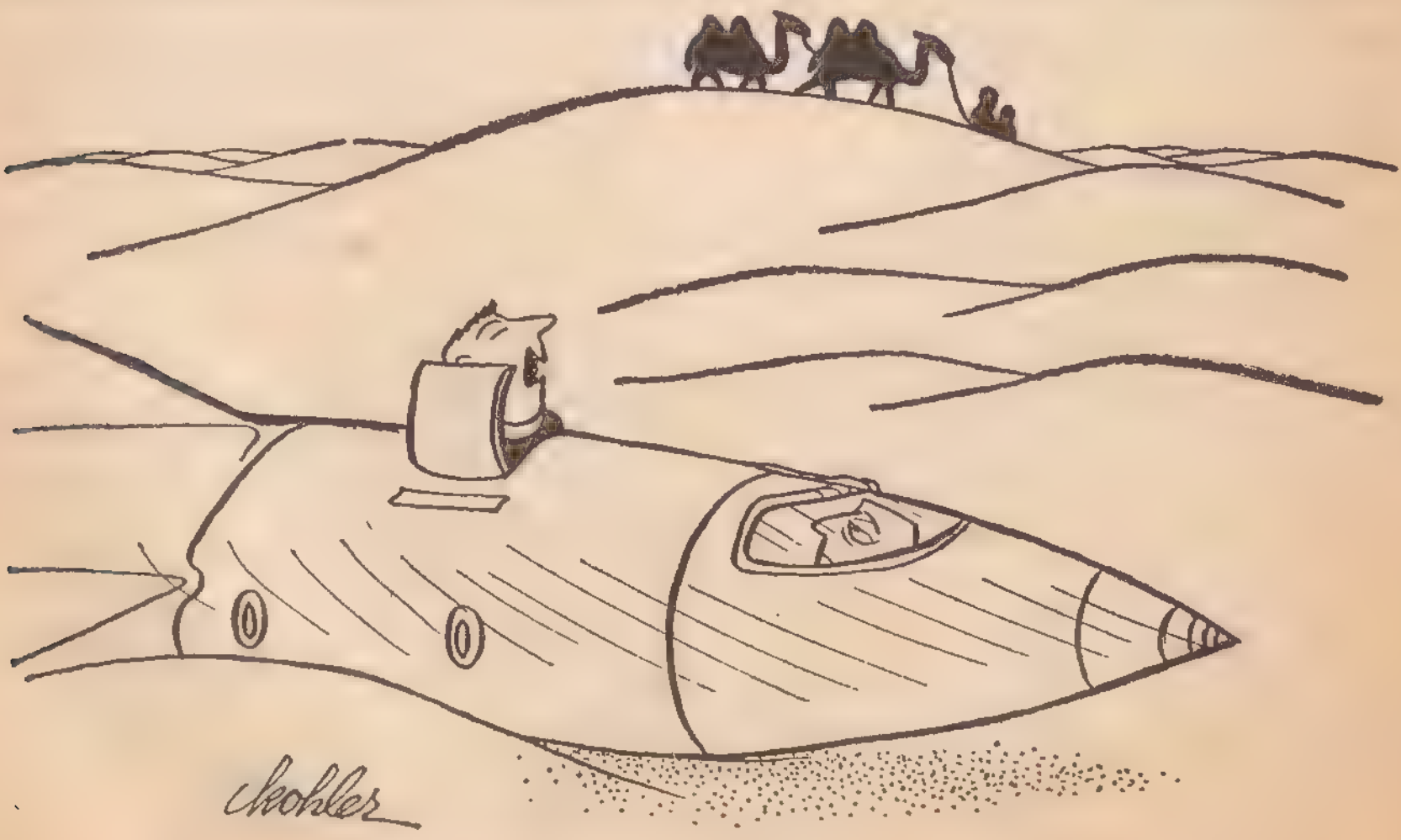
"I'm afraid so."

Harrell grinned weakly. "I guess I was just too many for him. The shock of having the core of his mind penetrated—" Tiredly he said, "Doc, how come you didn't get me out at the half-hour mark?"

"Eh?"

"I told you to pull me out after half an hour had gone by. Why didn't you? I was in there half a day, at least—and I might have stayed there forever."

The psychman was looking at him strangely. "Half a day, you say? No, Lieutenant Harrell. The total time elapsed from the moment you donned the helmet to the instant the alien screamed—why, it was less than 10 seconds!"



"Check those orbital charts again."

A department for all our readers throughout the world; here you can meet new friends who are interested in the same things you are. Listings are free, so send in yours today!

STUDENT

Gary Axelrod: 1513 W. Gilbert Ave., Peoria, Ill.

Age 16: "I'm a junior in high school, interested in all aspects of s-f. My hobbies are astronomy and chess. I'd like to play chess by mail."

SWEDISH STUDENT

Karen Pehrson: Box 1163 Granvag, Sollestea, Sweden.

Age 15: "I'm interested in science fiction with other major hobby dancing. Am a rock 'n roll fan and hope to hear from American teens."

STUDENT

George Wells: River Avenue, Box 486, Riverhead, N.Y.

Age 14: "I'm an s-f enthusiast and a rhythm & blues fan. Hate Presley and similar singers. Like Fats Domino, Billy Ward, among others. Also play chess."

STUDENT

Robert N. Johns: Box 390, Russelville, Kentucky

Age 13: "I like s-f, stamp collecting, and chemistry. I'd also like to play chess by mail with anyone interested."

STUDENT

Howard Eagley, Jr., Box 92, West Springfield, Pa.

Age 15: "I'm a high school junior with interests including coin collecting and s-f reading. Would like to hear from other teens."

STUDENT

Dennis Smith: 1332 Dent, Garland, Texas.

Age 12: "I'm a junior high school

student with s-f as a hobby. My academic interests include astronomy, astrophysics, paleontology, archeology, and physics. I'd like to correspond with other teens."

OFFICE WORKER

Florence E. Walters: 7 Bow St., Taunton, Mass.

Age 22: "I love to write letters, collect various and sundry things, and enjoy s-f and music."

GI

Charles Poole: Box 272, Kenai, Alaska

Age 24: "I'm temporarily in the Army, an avid s-f fan, especially interested in ESP and the possibility of other unknown, potential powers of the mind. Also interested in philosophy, psychology, radio and electronics."

STUDENT

David Locke: P.O. Box 207, Indian Lake, N.Y.

Age 13: "I'm a high school student, interested in astronomy, telepathy, time travel, UFOs and the fourth dimension. Hope to hear from other s-f fans my age."

STUDENT

William Hickman: P.O. Box 514, Kitimat, B.C., Canada

Age 16: "I'm a high school student majoring in math and science. I've been an s-f enthusiast for 2½ years and am particularly interested in telepathy and teleportation. Also enjoy most sports, particularly basketball, hockey, camping, and skiing."

STUDENT

Colen Llewellyn: 872 Charlotte St., Sudbury, Ontario, Canada

Age 15: "I'm interested in ESP, astronomy, physics, and history—particularly World War II. Also collect s-f and play chess."

AUSTRIAN STUDENT

Miss Ingeborg Kuta: Hasnerstrasse 93/16, Vienna 16, Austria

Age 18: "I would like very much to write to American s-f readers who are also interested in study of languages (German, French, Latin) just as I am in English. I like literature, music, films, sports, and most of the arts."

STUDENT

Christopher Cook: 200 Argyle Rd., West Palm Beach, Fla.

Age 14: "I'm a freshman in high school, collecting s-f and stamps and coins. I'd like to exchange ideas novels, writers, and s-f magazines. Other interests include dancing, swimming, hunting, and basketball."

STUDENT

Richard Pious: 486 E. 7th St., Brooklyn 18, N.Y.

Age 13: "I'm an honor student at Erasmus Hall high school, and have been reading s-f for 9 years. I like all sports but play only hockey and fool around with tennis and bowling. I'm interested in rocketry, aerodynamics, photography and writing. Would like to correspond

with other teens."

STUDENT

Paul Evins: 4063 Allendale Ave., Oakland 19, Cal.

Age 15: "I'm a junior in high school and have been an s-f fan four years. Other interests include astronomy, chemistry, sports, and —believe it or not—the stock market."

TANNERY WORKER

Harry Robbins: 29 Highland Ave., South Paris, Maine

Age 23: "I work in a tannery, and enjoy s-f. Am also interested in Hot Music, ESP, radio tinkering, science, and building model planes."

UNIVERSITY STUDENT

Ronnie Roysum: 826 University Ave., Reno, Nevada

Age 22: "I'm a student at the University of Nevada, interested in s-f and art. Hobbies include chess, tennis, modern jazz, and collecting s-f books—over two thousand."

STUDENT

Beverly Gaye Besly: 2205 Blossom St., Columbia, S.C.

Age 13: "I'm a junior high school student, interested in s-f, swimming, archery, and horse-back riding. Would like to exchange ideas on flying saucers."

MERCHANT MARINER

Fred W. Weihe, Jr.: 2108 Bristol Ave., Tampa 6, Fla.

Age 36: "I'm a former Merchant Marine Officer, now operating my own apartment building here in Tampa. I've been interested in s-f since my teens, with other hobbies including photography, classical music, and creative writing."

STUDENT

Robert Carr: 55 Lock St., Welland, Ont., Canada.

Age 16: "I'm a high school student, member of a group in school interested in setting up an s-f club. Hope to hear from other fans."

COLLEGE STUDENT

David C. Rupp: 1418 Maumee Ave., Fort Wayne, Ind.

Age 22: "I'm majoring in Chemical Engineering with interests including rocketry, s-f, amateur motion picture photography, and archeology."

OFFICE CLERK

James R. Mason: 826 Tennessee St., Gary, Ind.

Age 27: "I'm an office clerk, with interests ranging from s-f, semi-classical music, and hypnotism. Hope to hear from others."

COLLEGE STUDENT

David L. Brown: Rt. 5, Columbia, Mo.

Age 16: "I'm a college freshman, interested in s-f, astronomy, modern literature, and philosophy. Also collect s-f."

ELECTRONICS OPERATOR

Cpl. Robert A. Bullock: MACS-9,

Marine Corps Air Facility, Santa Ana, Calif.

Age 20: "I'm an aviation electronics operator, interested in s-f, particularly with reference to military application. Also like western music, and the theory of UFO and the possibility of extra-terrestrial life."

STUDENT

Larry Summers: 509 N. Willow St., Ingalls, Ind.

Age 15: "I'm interested in corresponding with guys and gals on s-f, UFO, interplanetary and interstellar travel. I also enjoy chess."

STUDENT

Jackie Darnell: Box 836, Lovelock, Nevada.

Age 14: "I'm a high school freshman, interested in s-f, art, and music—particularly rock 'n roll. Would like to write to other teens."

SCOTCH FAN

Gavin Brown: 47 Causeyside St., Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland.

Age 37: "I'm a mechanical shovel driver for a large engineering firm here in Scotland. My hobbies are corresponding, s-f, photography, home movies, and swapping & collecting magazines and first edition books. Have 40 first edition Rider Haggard books. I'll answer all letters."

ACCOUNTANT

Dennis A. Milham: 1720 N. Gower St., Hollywood 28, Cal.

Age 25: "I'm a former 4-year Navy man, weight-lifter, and aspiring writer. Follow accounting as my profession, however. Like all types of s-f but prefer brains to BEMs. Go for classical and progressive jazz music, opera, pops, Elvis and western. All types. Enjoy swimming and boating, basketball, horses, chess and scrabble."

RAILROADER

C. Benoit: Box 361, Zavalla, Texas.

Age 30: "I'm an agent for the T&NO RR travelling through East Texas mostly. Very interested in discussing s-f which I've been reading for 15 years. Am also interested in joining a fan club."

STUDENT

Leonard Katz: 2025 Regent Pl., Brooklyn 26, N.Y.

Age 17: "I'm interested in s-f, science in general, stamp collecting, sports, and chess. Hope to hear from others."

HOSPITAL AIDE

Mary Stutconis: P. O. Box 4, Parkerford, Pa.

Age 41: "I've been reading s-f since my teens. Am divorced, a psychiatric aide in a state hospital. As a result of my work I have a deep interest in psychology and hypnosis. Like reading, TV, dancing and swimming. Am also a great trip taker."

STUDENT

Donald Young: 1217 N. Page, Oklahoma City 17, Okla.

Age 16: "I'm a senior in high school and have been an s-f fan for many years. Interests include architecture, ESP, UFO, Atlantis, Lemuria, and Esoteric Christianity. Like rock 'n roll and most other music as well."

STUDENT

Gary Kingsbury: 1228 W. Market St., Warren, Ohio.

Age 14: "My interests are s-f reading and writing. I'd also like to trade German and English books."

STUDENT

Bruce J. Jefferies: 4064 Mandarin Ave., Hayward, Cal.

Age 12: "I'm interested in chemistry, physics, hypnotism, astronomy and space flight. Also study math, ESP, play chess, and enjoy s-f. Would like to exchange views with fans whose interests parallel my own."

STUDENT

Christopher B. Brooks: 3906 Vaux St., Philadelphia 29, Pa.

Age 14: "I attend the Wm. Penn Charter School, with interests including chemistry, rocketry, and astronomy. My hobby is s-f and I enjoy dancing, swimming, and pop music. Fascinated with UFO."

WRITER & EDITOR

Lawrence M. Anderson: 915 King St., Alexandria, Va.

Age 24: "I'm a writer and editor of electronics courses for a school in Washington, D.C. Naturally most of my hobbies lean toward science and electronics, but am very active in outdoor sports—boating, hunting, fishing. Good music and dancing also appeal to me."

JOURNALISM STUDENT

Marguerite Shaft: 2075 Delhi, NE., Holt, Mich.

Age 17: "I'm a college student working for my degree in journalism. I like to write, mostly short stories. I train horses and am a riding and horsemanship instructor. Love s-f."

STUDENT

Adrian Melott: 334 Highland Ave., Moundsville, West Va.

Age 12: "I'm interested in photography, s-f, ESP, swimming, chemistry, UFOs, anthropology, astronomy, coin collecting, mineralology, and ancient history. Will answer all letters."

STUDENT

Philip Paskowitz: 676 Pennsylvania Ave., Brooklyn 7, N.Y.

Age 11: "I'm interested in science, and my hobbies include stamp collecting, foreign currency and coins, and license plates. Would like to write and trade with other fans."

OFFICE WORKER

Don Mortimer: 40 Casa Loma Apts., 309 Sherbrook St., Winnipeg, Man., Canada.

Age 23: "I'm an office worker and am quite interested in s-f. Would like to hear from fans in the mid-

west area of USA."

STUDENT

Ilene Weinstein: 2543 East 21st St., Brooklyn 35, N.Y.

Age 13: "I collect records, love parties, and read plenty of s-f. Am vastly interested in UFO and would like to hear from others."

IBM MACHINERY WORKER

Miss Carol A. Burgin: 238 Trask St., Aurora, Ill.

Age 25: "I work with IBM machinery, with hobbies including photography (35 mm slide) music, plays, TV, and travel. Like to hear from others."

GROCERY CLERK-BUYER

John C. Creson: Box 325, Port Orford, Ore.

Age 20: "I'm a grocery clerk and buyer, interested in s-f and dancing. Also interested in sports—football and bowling. Would particularly like to hear from fans in foreign lands."

STUDENT

Newton Jones: Nantahala, N.C.

Age 15: "I'm an s-f fan and collect books. Also enjoy small game hunting and fishing. Hope to hear from other fans."

STUDENT

Irwin Sulzbacker: 3728 Lyme Ave., Brooklyn 24, N.Y.

Age 16: "I'm a junior in high school, interested in s-f, ESP, and UFO. Hobbies are photography (8 mm movies) and astronomy. Hope to hear from other teens at home and abroad."

STUDENT

Tena Mathews: 305 Steinman, Dallas 3, Texas.

Age 15: "I'm crazy about s-f, outdoor sports, and dancing. Like rock 'n roll and rhythm & blues. Like Elvis Presley, Danny and the Juniors, and others. Also like art. Hope to hear from fans especially in foreign countries."

STUDENT

Jared C. McDade: 89 Purchase St., Purchase, N.Y.

Age 16: "I've been interested in s-f about six years. Collect s-f magazines and books. Would like to hear from other fan collectors."

STUDENT

Ray Walters: 2154 Floyd, SW, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Age 15: "I'm a high school student interested in short story writing, mostly s-f. Interested in UFO and trading and collecting s-f mags."

HOUSEKEEPER

Miss Margaret White: 230 Cervantes Blvd., San Francisco, Cal.

Age 47: "I'm a housekeeper, interested in ESP and its development. I also like classical music, art, and literature."

MARINE

Pfc Jan R. Fee: 2nd Hvy. Arty. Rkt. Btry., Camp Geiger, N.C.

Age 18: "I'm an s-f fan, interested in ESP, chess, coin collecting, and mechanics. Hope other fans my age will write."

RADIO & TV STUDENT

Roy Ramon: 4331 Bell, Kansas City 11, Mo.

Age 22: "I'm an s-f enthusiast, with interests including music, photography, guns, cars, and sports. I'm studying radio & TV repair."

STUDENT

Helen Sulzman: 23 Burd St., Pennington, N.J.

Age 15: "I'm a high school sophomore, interested in s-f, music dancing, sports, and reading. I'd enjoy hearing from fellows and girls my age."

STUDENT

Douglas Weller: 417 Gerona Ave., Coral Gables, Fla.

Age 15: "I'm an s-f fan, interested primarily in ESP, UFO, and extra-terrestrial life. My hobbies are sailing and reading. Like music and play the guitar. Hope to hear from guys and gals my age."

STUDENT

Barbara Hanson: 2322 Sheffield Ave., Chicago 14, Ill.

Age 19: "I'm a sophomore chemistry major at DePaul University. I'm interested in science, music and s-f. Hope interested fans will write."

HOUSEWIFE & TEACHER

Ruth Justice: 246 Dulton Dr., Toledo 7, Ohio.

Age 34: "I'm the mother of four children and a teacher. Would like to swap s-f mags and books. Main hobby is s-f."

STUDENT

Sharon Bellville: 167 Spring St., St. Ignace, Mich.

Age 15: "I'm a newly ordained s-f fan. I plan to go into medical research and/or surgery. Would like to write to guys and gals interested in scientific fields."

STUDENT

Robert Biddle: 520 Kenwood Dr., Menlo Park, Cal.

Age 18: "My main interests include mathematics, physics, astronomy, chemistry, ESP, astronautics, psychology, and such sports as swimming and bowling. Hope I'll hear from fellows and girls my age."

STUDENT

Sophie Sulzman: 23 Burd St., Pennington, N.J.

Age 16: "I'm a junior in high school, interested in s-f, math, swimming, bowling, and other sports. Would like to hear from other teens."

STUDENT

Lloyd J. Mathews, Jr.: 4411 Alice Ave., Austin 5, Texas.

Age 14: "I'm a student in junior high, interested in UFO and astrophysics. I'd like to exchange sighting data, clippings, etc., with any saucer enthusiasts."

— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

STARWAYS

by Poul Anderson, (price not listed), 224 pages, Avalon Books, 22 East 60th St. New York 22, N. Y.

This story is a deep - space tale about the Galactic Nomads, those modern gypsies of the interstellar void. Spaceships belonging to these nomadic peoples are vanishing and it is the duty of Captain Joachim of the *Peregrine,* to find out why.

I'm sorry to report that as good a writer as Poul Anderson is, he fails to make this one come off. He invariably does a first-rate job when he restricts himself to the simpler scale of a tale embedded in an historical matrix. This gives him facts with which he can weave his fantasies. But when he wanders into "deep-space" he's not believable nor interesting.

Poul Anderson is a good writer indeed, and I would think that historical novels would be his forte. In fact I take the liberty of suggesting he do this pattern because his very best science fiction stories seem to be concerned with historical matters. Even those which are not, parody events and cultures of an earlier time.

Conceivably Anderson might make a good collaborator for another science fictioneer whose skill with words is less but whose imagination is greater. Oh well, as long as he doesn't stop writing . . .

Conducted by Robert Bloch

Q. IS IT TRUE, MR. BLOCH, THAT YOU AND BOB TUCKER RECENTLY PUT OUT A ONE-SHOT FANZINE CALLED "SCIENCE FICTION FIFTY-YEARLY"?

A. That is correct. And for the benefit of all you lucky, lucky people who didn't get copies, the fanzine acknowledged the fact that Tucker and I, between us, have spent approximately fifty years in fandom, with no time off for good behavior.

Q. I SUPPOSE YOU WROTE ABOUT WHAT YOU'D LEARNED ABOUT FANS DURING ALL THESE YEARS?

A. Certainly not—this was a fanzine, not *Confidential.*

Q. WELL, SURELY YOU MUST HAVE FOUND OUT SOMETHING YOU COULD REPORT ON?

A. The funny thing is, I found out how many things I *don't* know about fandom. Plus all sorts of things I have never been able to understand about science fiction.

Q. SUCH AS?

A. Well, take tight pants, for example.

Q. TIGHT PANTS?

A. You tailored that question for me. But the fact remains, ever since I began reading science fiction, I've been wondering about those tight pants. It seems that whenever you see an illustration of a man wearing the garb of the future, he has on a pair of skintight trousers. Long before Superman got his first suit of red flannel underwear, these leotards were worn in all the science fiction magazines. You see them in the fanzines to-

day, and even in the science fiction movies. It doesn't matter if the scene is the year 2100 or the year 21,000,000—men's fashions just don't seem to change.

Q. WHAT DO THE MEN OF THE FUTURE WEAR IN WINTER?

A. That's another thing—there *isn't* any winter in most science fiction stories. Ever noticed that? Sure, it's cold on some of the other planets, but when dealing with our earth in the future, the story seems to be set in a warm climate.

Q. WELL, THAT'S LUCKY FOR THE MEN, ISN'T IT?

A. If you think the men are lucky, you ought to see the women! According to the way *they* dress in the illustrations, their chief problem in winter would be how to get the icicles out of their brassieres.

Q. ANYTHING ELSE ON YOUR MIND?

A. Besides brassieres, you mean? Well, come to think of it, there is. I worry because nobody wears glasses. Take a look at any fanzine printing photographs of Conventions or fan-gatherings. Chances are, you'll find at least half of the fans sporting spectacles. And even if you ignore fans in favor or real human beings, the same holds true. In my daughter's high school class, about fifty per cent of the students wear glasses. Apparently myopia is on the increase. But does *anyone* wear glasses in the world of the future? Not according to the science fiction I've read. It seems unrealistic, somehow. At least you'd think the Bug-Eyed Monsters would go to an oculist.

Q. IT DOESN'T SURPRISE ME. IF WE ACCEPT YOUR SKIN-TIGHT PANTS THEORY, NOBODY EVEN WEARS A TRUSS. SO WHAT ELSE IS WRONG?

A. You aren't asking me the right questions, that's what's wrong. This column is supposed to be about fans and fanzines. And here you've got me all mixed up with trusses.

Q. IF THE SHOE FITS, WEAR IT. BUT ALL RIGHT, WHAT ABOUT FANZINES? WHAT DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND CONCERNING THEM?

A. Well, in some cases, I don't understand the text—mainly because I can't read it. Do you realize that since 1932, I've probably seen about 2,500 fan magazines?

Q. DON'T COME WHINING TO ME FOR SYMPATHY!

A. I don't want sympathy—I want a magnifying-glass and a crew of decoding experts. Because almost a third of those fanzines were totally illegible. I've got a theory that a lot of science fiction fans wear glasses because they've strained their eyes trying to read fan magazines. Faint inking, blurry reproduction, single-spacing without paragraphs, printing on poor stock or on colored stock that obscures the text—and then the editors wonder why they don't get more comments on what they run!

Q. SEEMS TO ME YOU'VE

MADE THIS COMPLAINT BEFORE.

A. I made it twenty-five years ago. And I suppose a certain percentage of fanzine editors can't help themselves. It's just lucky some of them weren't around to transcribe the original version of the Ten Commandments on those stone tablets. We'd still be trying to figure out what those faint little squiggles were on the corner of the stone. About the only thing that would come out clearly would be the big Rotsler illustration.

Q. WHAT ELSE BOTHERS YOU IN THE FANZINE FIELD?

A. Well, there's this business of dating.

Q. YOU MEAN LIKE WHEN YOU GO TO A CONVENTION AND YOU SEE A PRETTY GIRL AND YOU SAY—

A. Never mind what I say! No, I refer to the dating of fanzines. If you look on the contents-page of an assortment of fan magazines, you'll find that Number One is issued monthly, Number Two is bi-monthly, Number Three is quarterly, and Number Four is irregularly published.

Q. AND WHAT'S SO PUZZLING ABOUT THAT?

A. Well, what I want to know is—why do all four of these magazines come out once every six months?

Q. MAYBE THE EDITORS DON'T GET ENOUGH GOOD MATERIAL FOR REGULAR ISSUES?

A. Since when did *this* ever stop 'em from publishing a fanzine?

Q. YOU HAVE A POINT THERE. I NOTICED IT THE MOMENT YOU TOOK YOUR HAT OFF.

A. Never mind with the cheap gags. I'm serious about this. It's not that I believe fanzine editors have any sacred responsibility to maintain a rigorous schedule. But for this very reason, I'd think it would be a lot easier for most of them to make a frank statement of the fact that they don't intend to adhere to a fixed date of issue. It would be fairer to subscribers. For that matter, I also am oldfashioned enough to believe that when a fanzine goes out of business, the editor should refund the remaining portion of subscription fees to his customers. Some of them do, but a few don't—and such tactics are poor public relations for the field. A minor matter, perhaps, but worth noting. And speaking of poor publication relations, there's this business of hoaxes.

Q. DON'T YOU BELIEVE FANS ARE ENTITLED TO A LITTLE FUN?

A. Of course I do. But there are—or should be—certain limits. It's one thing to run an article under a pseudonym; quite another to build up a completely fictitious character who may, under the guise of an assumed identity, solicit material from unsuspecting fans for a magazine or issue spurious reports concerning the activities of other fans. I fail to see the "humor" in a death-report, too. And I have never believed that perpetrating

a fraud upon a group which takes your statements in good faith constitutes either a "good joke" or an indication of superority upon the part of the perpetrator. Deception is not a synonym for cleverness.

Q. YOU EVER SEND MATERIAL TO A PSEUDONYM?

A. Only letters. But speaking of material, there's another thing I can't understand. Why is it that most of the fan-editors who send you those desperate, "Gee, I'm on the spot, fella, you gotta help me out with an article right away quick please" requests seem to be the ones who never get around to publishing your stuff at all? And, to compound the felony, they never bother to return your material to you for use elswhere, either. It's incidents like this which sour contributors. Even though lack of time has forced me to give up turning out fanzine material some months ago, I know of at least six articles of mine which are floating around in some kind of fannish Limbo—some of them written, in response to piteous rush-rush pleas, as long as three years ago! If they ever *do* turn up anywhere in print, I'm going to be mighty embarrassed; here I've turned down legitimate requests, and the editors involved are going to wonder why it is that I'm apparently writing material for some other guy they may never have even heard of. I admit I don't dig this practise.

Q. ANYTHING ELSE THAT BREAKS YOUR SHOVELS?

A. Yes, but I might as well save some of it for future columns. After all, I'm supposed to review fanzines in this space.

Q. OH, SO THAT'S WHAT YOU DO! I WAS WONDERING.

A. Well, stop wondering and start reading, because here we go.

AND BEFORE we get into the actual reviewing, here's a notice I've been asked to insert:

"Dainis Bisenieks, Box 2065, Ann Arbor, Michigan, would like to hear from any fans interested in a discussion zine devoted in large part to the problems of human life off this earth. Are legs needed on a *space* suit? How high can a man jump on the Moon? What kinds of sports might be played under free fall or low gravity conditions? If such questions fascinate you, write; if you have mathematical or technical knowledge, so much the better. The zine will depend entirely on a sufficient number of *actively* interested readers. The projected title is FREE F'ALL, which indicates content, not price. 15c from every interested reader, plus material for the first issue, will get it started. Money and any material in manuscript form will be returned if zine does not materialize."

Now, let's start the parade with SCIENCE FICTION PARADE (Len J. Moffatt, 10202 Belcher, Downey, Cal.: quarterly: no price). The sixth issue, now at hand, upholds the high standards which make this the best news-zine on the West Coast. Walt Willis and Rory Faulkner do a report on the London Convention: there's an article on British

prozines, a column on American prozines, another on fanzines, and editorializing by Moffatt himself. Naturally, the big preoccupation lies with the coming 1958 World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles—and no wonder, seeing as how Len's wife is Chairlady of the affair. If you're interested in a progress report from the Coast, this is a must. Of course, you can always get the *official* bulletin by sending your $1 Membership Fee to Rick Sneary, 2962 Santa Ana Street, South Gate, California. A suggestion I heartily endorse. (If you send a check, Rick Sneary will endorse it).

East Coast news, as always, is offered by SCIENCE FICTION TIMES (Fandom House, P.O. Box 2331, Paterson 23, N.J.: bi-weekly: 10c, $2 a year) and after 284 issues there's little need to inform any fan about the merits of this science fiction newspaper. Besides, they're more interested in subscriptions than descriptions.

Still another news source, recently inaugurated, is RUMBLE NEWSLETTER (John Magnus, 6 S. Franklintown Rd., Baltimore 23, Md.: weekly: no price) which offers a miscellany of notes concerning the Washingtonian fan group. I don't know how long actifan Magnus can keep it up, but your interest will probably be welcome.

STELLAR (Ted E. White, 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Va.: irreg.: 15c 5/50c) devotes a large part of issue No. 13 to material left over from Harlan Ellison's old DIMENSIONS. White, Ellison, Richard Geis, Magnus, Randall Garrett and two pseudonyms—Harold Van Dall and Franklin Ford—come up with an entertaining bundle this time. Again, there's an East Coast flavor to this clambake.

DEMENTIA PRAECOX No. 1 (Bill Richardt, 21175 Goldsmith, Farmington, Mich.: bi-monthly: 6/$1) is going to hate me because I inadvertently gave the above address instead of another one listed elsewhere in its pages. However, maybe I can take the heat off by stating that this is a genuine specimen of Detroit iron, put on the road by the local fans who are getting in gear for a 1959 Convention bid. But it's not a mere propaganda-sheet: you'll find a nice fat issue offering material by old-time fan Al Ashley, a page of Mid-WestCon photos by George Young, Burt Beerman's fanzine review section, and a lot of illos, some of the most illustrious being by William Rotsler. This could be quite a gasser if enthusiasm holds.

YANDRO No. 58 (Coulsons, 105 Stitt St., Wabash, Indiana: monthly: 10c, 12/$1) is an example of enthusiasm which *has* held. Indiana fandom is, as usual, well represented in this current issue. In fact, it's augmented by the arrival of one Bruce Coulson—a joint effort on the part of the editors, whose work has always been noted for impeccable reproduction. Congratulations are in order—and extended.

ETHERLINE (AFPA, 90 Lilydale Grove, Hawthorn East, Victoria, Australia: monthly: 13/$1) seems to have lost its U.S. representatives somewhere between the 89th and 90th issues. Nevertheless,

for those of you who are interested in a fanzine written in Australian, with a somewhat "international" flavor, this can be recommended to you. As usual, an AUTHOR-STORY bibliography is featured, and provides a sort of ready-made index to pro writers and their record of publication. Robert Abernathy is the present subject, with Ray Bradbury slated for the next listing.

Incidentally, several other Australian and New Zealand fanzines have been received during the past year, but their publication schedules seem irregular—and in the absence of American representatives, it was decided not to list them in this column. If it appears in the future that *they* will appear in the future, I'll include names and details—in the future. At present, only ETHERLINE seems to be a permanent up-and-comer from down under.

If you're planning a European trip, here's a word from Leif Helgesson, Box 895, Stockholm 1, Sweden. "All American fans who visit Stockholm are welcome at the FUTURA SF CLUB and my home is hereby open to all American fans. In our club, the youngest member is 12 and the oldest, 65. But the most common age group is 20-25." I am quite sure that Leif's invitation to visit is genuine—he has already given evidence of his friendly generosity by sending me a stack of Swedish magazines containing stories of mine, and it's quite a shock to discover that in Sweden, Lefty Feep is know as "Lefty Brown." I have been having quite a ball trying to decipher the Swedish texts, and can't seem to get the language through my thick skoal. STAR STUFF is the club fanzine, also in Swedish. It looks like a nice job—available from above address.

American fanzines, on the other hand, are easier to peruse. OOPSLA (Gregg Calkins, 1068 Third Ave., Salt Lake City 3, Utah: bi-monthly: 15c, 4/50c) offers its 22nd issue, featuring nostalgic material by John Berry and Dean A. Grennell. Regular columnist Walt Willis is missing this time around, but he'll be back in No. 23, along with Vernon L. McCain and other standbys of this outstanding publication.

SPHERE No. 7 (Joe Christoff, P.O. Box 196, Cantonment, Fla.: bi-monthly, 20c. 6/$1) celebrates its first anniversary with a glassined cover and 27 pages of assorted fan-fiction and articles from old fans like Ackerman and young fans like Richard Koogle.

Another anniversary issue is offered by TWIG (Guy Terwilleger, 1412 Albright St., Boise, Idaho: bi-monthly: 15c). This 7th issue shapes up to a fat 63 pages, featuring just about every type of article, story and department you'd expect to find in a general magazine—plus an imposing array of illustrations.

JD No. 25 (Lynn Hickman, 304 N. 11th St., Mount Vernon, Ill.: tri-monthly: 20c) is an old standby. This issue is given over largely to a discussion of integration and segregation by a number of prominent fans, and so is the short appendix which Hickman labels JD No. 26.

CANADIAN FANDOM No. 35 (William D. Grant, 11 Burton Rd.,

Toronto 10, Ont., Canada: bi-monthly: 8/$1) is distinguished for its special article on Ray Bradbury by Sam Moskowitz, plus material on jazz, movies, and modern art forms in general. A sercon publication, or should I say, serCan? (I shouldn't).

If you've been conscious of a lack of adjectives sprinkled through the reviews thus far, it's because I've been saving them up for SKYHOOK No. 25 (Redd Boggs, 2209 Highland Place NE, Minneapolis 21, Minn.: quarterly: 20c, 6/$1). This quarterly review of science fiction inevitably contains material of interest to every fan in the field, and the present 48-page issue calls for superlatives. Arthur Jean Cox offers an analysis of the stories of Harry Bates: Dean Grennell dips into the pages of old ASTOUNDINGS: Fred Chappell considers A. E. van Vogt: Jim Harmon tackles Evan Hunter for a loss: Marion Zimmer Bradley reviews Silverberg, and the composite effect is one of literacy, good taste, and maturity. Editor Boggs has a knack of getting the very best from his contributors, and the result is a magazine of signal distinction.

RETRIBUTION No. 8 (John Berry, 31 Campbell Park Ave., Belmont, Belfast, Northern Ireland: quarterly: 15c) is co-edited by Arthur Thomson, who has contributed a front and back cover which really stoned me. In between aforesaid covers is a grand farrago of humor concerning the doings of the Goon Defective Agency—a two-headed brainchild of the editors. Affable and laughable.

CRY OF THE NAMELESS No. 110 (Box 92, 920 3rd Avenue, Seattle 4, Wash.: bi-monthly: 10c, 12/$1) is a joint effort of the Seattle group—all of whom deserve high praise, because so far they have resisted the temptation to make any puns about "Seattlites". This issue features John Berry's PACIFIC 510, which may or may not owe its inspiration to Swiss composer Arthur Honnegger's PACIFIC 231. But for me, the magazine is distinguished, as usual, by the painstaking and penetrating review columns of prozines and fanzines. You may not always agree with the conclusions of the critics, but chances are you'll find them stimulating. The present interest in the author of THE MOON POOL seems especially Merrittorious.

PORTALS No. 1 (Alan J. Lewis, Box 37, East Aurora, N.Y.: 5 times a year: 25c, 5/$1) is largely the work of the editor and Seth Johnson, though it does include a poem by Clark Ashton Smith and a partial biography of that writer. But the major effort of the issue is devoted to a prozine review section by Mr. Johnson which contains many items I'd like to quote in full. Perhaps the flavor of the whole can be partially conveyed by this paragraph, selected at random:

> "Campbell writes a pretty good editorial which is more of a scientific article but good reading nevertheless on learning and it tries to analyze the learning patterns or the way in which we learn. He must have read a couple of volumes on phsychology to get all the info together that he presents you with, in a sugar

coated pill so to speak."

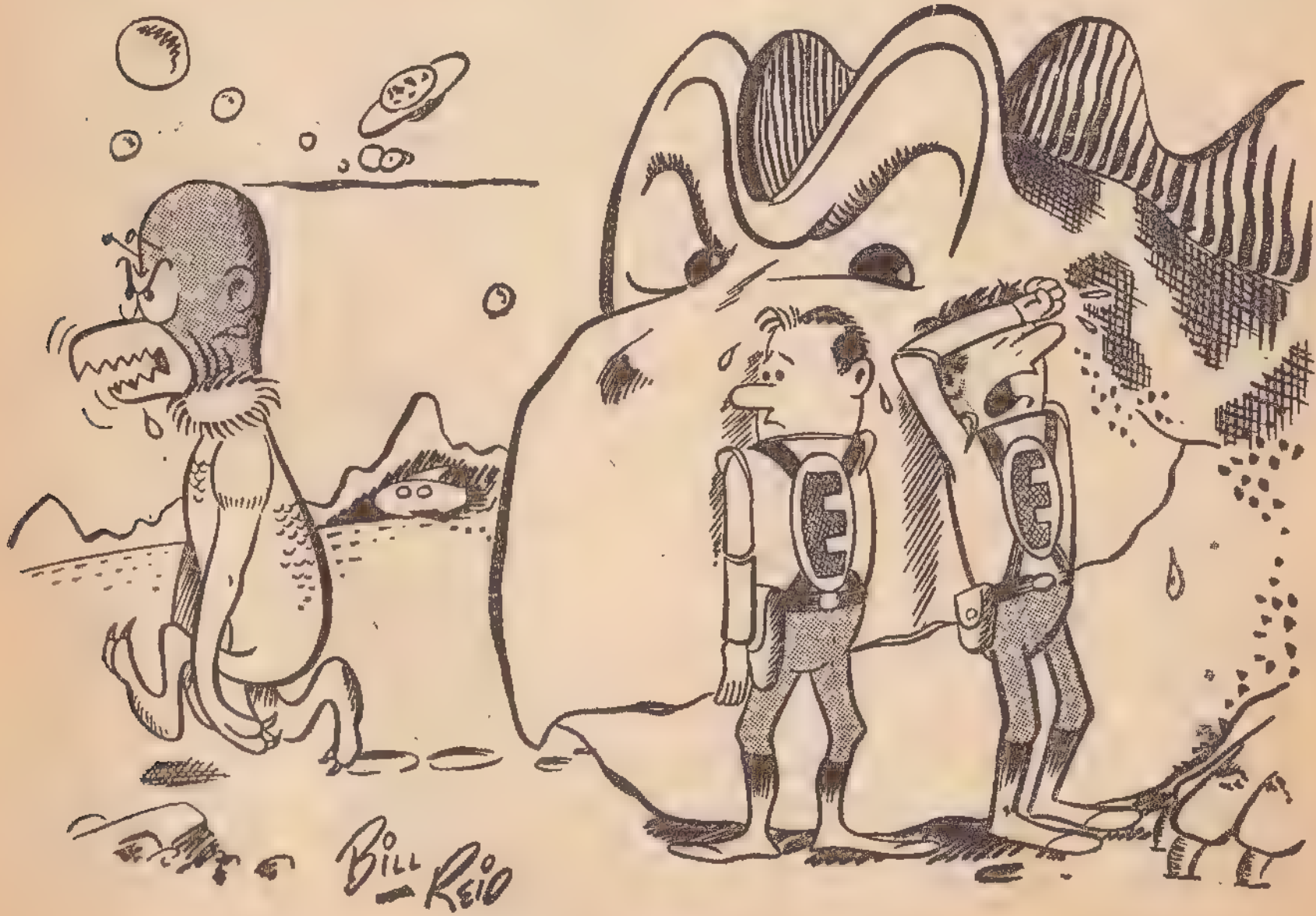
There is more of the same; much more. Plus appropriate artwork by Doug Payson.

A BAS No. 10 (Boyd Raeburn, 9 Glenvalley Drive, Toronto 9, Canada: irreg.: 25c) is as fine a thing to come out of Canada as I've ever seen, and that includes Captain John's Rum or Liquor Control Board Scotch. In some ways, this is even more intoxicating.

Editor Raeburn offers a penetrating and amusing report of his European visit, plus a ditto and ditto DERELICTI DEROGATION. Alex Kirs, Bob Tucker, Harry Warner, Jr., and the editor of this column are also represented—the first three most brilliantly. And then there's MY FAIR FEMMEFAN, in which Carl Brandon does a stunning fannish parody of MY FAIR LADY. This isn't the kind of thing that one "composes on stencil" or just dashes off in a hasty first draft, either—it represents many hours of loving labor. But the results are hilariously worthy of Brandon's effort, and of your attention. I've no hesitation in saying that I consider it to be one of the best parodies I've ever read in the fan-field. My congratulations to him for writing it.

Now the time has come to slam the lid down on FANDORA'S BOX once again. See you next issue.

—*Robert Bloch*



"Whew! Talk about a close call!"

ROAD FOR DREAMERS

Dear Bill:

There is no such thing as "adult" science fiction. There is inept writing and there is experienced writing. There never has been and never will be such a thing as "adult" writing.

A certain small group has assumed a peculiar control over this field of entertainment. What is peculiar about this control is that it was won with little effort on their part. Their weapon was a weakness shared by most science fiction readers—the fear of ridicule.

To rationalize their own attraction to this field of writing, this certain small group decided that the particular types of fiction they, personally, approved were actually finer forms of writing. To further sanctify their position, they proceeded to instill themselves with idiot godhood. A campaign was begun with the purpose of damning with derision all who believed opposite from them.

The argument these people use in their defense could be, "Obviously we must be right. Observe how strongly we have influenced this field. We have raised it to a higher level." The key word in this imaginative answer is "influenced."

It is no secret that the leaders in this attack were already well established in other fields of literature as writers and critics. They were in a perfect position to wield the hammer of ridicule against any opposition. What may have been genuine human ego at the outset deteriorated into sophomoric conceit. In blind acceptance of themselves, they decreed that what they liked was "adult"; all counter viewpoints were infantile.

It is time to reverse the honors. I will assume that what they refer to as "adult writing" translates to "great writing". The answer to this is quite simple. No writer now, or at any time in recorded history has ever set out to deliberately create "great" works of fiction and succeeded in anything but falling flat

on his egotist face. This we now pass through is not an era of "adult" fiction; this is senility. Science fiction writing, in general, has decayed to a pattern of setting down only those things "—we know are true." This can be exceedingly boring. This is frightfully dull. All things that are established "facts" began as the wildest surmises by men who were seeking nothing in particular when the seed was sown.

Science fiction is a world of unrestrained concepts. Imagination is a world without directions. Fact is only a catalyst or driftwood picked up along the way. A disastrous land for anchored minds; a place of grand illusion and fantastic fulfillment for those with the courage to travel light. This is a road for dreamers.

D. Bruce Berry
921 Eastwood Ave.
Chicago, Ill.

Pretty well thoughtout, Bruce. We'll look forward to reader comment. wlh

SOMETHING EXTRA. . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

In your reply to a letter from Dale Spady in the February issue of *Madge*, you mentioned that "active" fandom would not mention IMAGINATION or IMAGINATIVE TALES in the same breath with *Galaxy*, *Astounding*, or *F & SF*.

I think someone needs to wake "active" fandom up. Apparently they don't know when they're well off.

Just how they reached that state of being I'd like to know. I've been a regular reader of *Galaxy* for about four years and *Astounding* a little less so I'm quite familiar with the magazines. The thing is, if I have two or more magazines available to read at one time, chances are high they'll all contain good stories. Yet for some reason I always pick up one of yours to read first.

Your magazines have a little something extra that make them more readable.

I would not only mention *Madge* or *Tales* in the same breath, I would mention them first.

Helen Noe
99 Winthrop Dr.
Akron 19, Ohio

We won't fight it! . . . . . wlh

COLD ON IVAR

Dear Bill Hamling:

Yesterday I walked down to the drugstore and bought the February issue of *Madge*. The COSMIC LOOTERS was about your best novel since CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS (October 1956 issue). The only disappointing thing was the ending wherein the good old hero kisses the beautiful maiden.

Well, after I read that little gem I was all set for a great lineup of short stories. I was really disappointed. A MADMAN ON BOARD was the only story that lived up to my expectations. Silverberg came up with a good one, as usual. DEATH WALKS ON MARS was only fair, while GET OUT OF MY BODY! and NEVER TRUST A THIEF both really stunk. Doesn't Ivar Jorgensen ever get sick of writing the crummy stuff he writes in your mag? Don't you? If it were up to

me I'd cut out Jorgensen and add five or six pages to the letter section.

John Morton
RD, Gen. Washington Dr.
Media, Pa.

We hope Ivar will redeem himself shortly—when he gets back from cryberia! . . . . . wlh

AN ORCHID FOR SMITTY

Dear Bill Hamling:

I'm back again to congratulate Alex Blade for a well done job, THE COSMIC LOOTERS. He seems to have a knack for writing novels about invasions from other stars, and I hope he keeps turning them out. I would also like to tip my hat to Malcolm Smith for the wonderful job he did on the February cover. (Ditto the December issue.) Excellent.

As for the rest of the magazine, I rate it as follows:

1. DEATH WALKS ON MARS—a bloody little gem, almost believable.

2. A MADMAN ON BOARD—not quite up to Silverberg's standards.

3. NEVER TRUST A THIEF—very good. Jorgensen really surprised me with that trick ending.

4. GET OUT OF MY BOOY!—a fine plot but not too well written. Harris could have done better.

The departments, as usual, were all good.

Robert Fox
155 Koster Row
Eggertsville, N.Y

Smith has some new covers on tap. Watch for them. . . . . wlh

FANNISH REBUTTAL

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Dale Spady's most interesting letter as well as your answer in the February issue arouse my interest enough to drop you a few words on the subject.

To go over your answer, sentence by sentence:

1. Yes, you might say your attitude toward fandom is "friendly" but is it any different than a great number of other prozines that also feature fan columns? Robert Bloch's illustrious column is the only thing "fannish" in *Madge*. Your editorial rarely deals with it and the letter column is open mainly for lauds and orchids for The Great Ghod Hamling. As I say, FANDORA'S BOX is the only fannish thing in *Madge*.

2. Bloch's column is your only method of "communicating" with Fandom. And don't think Fandom doesn't appreciate it. . .a great many fans buy *Madge* for the sheer purpose of reading the work of Bob Bloch each issue. It's the fiction that doesn't sit well with Fandom. Bloch's column couldn't be better.

3. Fandom looks down on your books because the fiction is of a juvenile nature; it is stereotyped with nothing but action and only the vaguest resemblance of a plot with absolutely no characterization or skilled writing. Fandom has a great deal of intelligence, thankfully, and one who shows even the slightest trace of intelligence will want more out of reading than action.

4. Fandom considers *F &SF, As-*

tounding, and *Galaxy* better magazines because the fiction is on a much more mature level. You must realize that the fans will not laud a prozine review. You will certainly agree that fiction is the vital factor of any prozine. And if the fiction bores Fandom, would you expect any words of praise?

5. "The only place fandom finds an open door. . ." To really find a place where fandom has an open door, look to the magazines of Larry Shaw and Doc Lowndes where not only are fanzine reviews featured, but interesting and oft-times fannish editorials are written, fannish letter columns are conducted, the fiction is of a quality that appeals to Fandom, and even the editors are still, more or less, fans themselves. *There* is where fen flock.

6. Never had it so good? Well, I must admit FANDORA'S BOX *is* the Very Best, but the other assets listed above, combined together, will make for a much more popular magazine to Fandom. With a *truly* fanish prozine, fans will endorse it with enthusiasm, but with a magazine fannish in *only* one column, a fan would be smarter to write to Bloch, himself, than to the magazine.

If you print this letter at least you'll be showing you're more of a fannish magazine than I hold you to be at the moment.

Bill Meyers
4301 Shawnee Circle
Chattanooga 11, Tenn.

1. *MADGE is not meant to be a "fan" magazine! it simply offers fandom a bridge to the major science fiction audience.* 2. *We like Bob too.* 3. *See Bruce Berry's sage epistle this issue.* 4. *At least in MADGE they get one review. . .as to the fiction, thank goodness our tens of thousands of readers don't agree with you.* 5. *We were not referring to Larry Shaw or others. Only the so-called "big three" in fandom's opinion.* 6. *Bob's always glad to hear from readers. His address is Box* 362, *Weyauwega, Wis. . . . So now we're fannish, huh?. . . . . .wlh*

DROP OUR BEM?!!

Dear Bill Hamling:

The February issue was great, with the lead novel THE COSMIC LOOTERS standing out among the best you've had in a long time. The idea was original, and it was played to the fullest. And when I read Tom Harris' GET OUT OF MY BODY! I knew that my money had been invested wisely for if there had been nothing else in the issue that story was worth the 35c alone. NEVER TRUST A THIEF by Jorgensen was another one with the type of ending I like.

The cover was great, though not symbolic, as in the opinion of Peter Bovier. The issue, however, is not without its weak point—and I mean that stupid cartoon on page 65. When are you going to get rid of those *hairy monster* cartoons?

I also read IMAGINATIVE TALES, but can't always find it on my newsstand. How about getting it there for me?

Chet Guiles
Mulberry Point
Guilford, Conn.

Our Hairy BEM is now what amounts to an institution, Chet.

(No remarks, son!) Bet most readers don't agree with you on that one. . . . As to not finding TALES —please ask for the magazine. Call up the wholesale magazine distributor in your town and put in your complaint. We'd appreciate it if every reader would do this. Proper distribution is a real problem and it's too complex for us to control on the local level. That's where our readers can help .....wlh

OUR PLACE IN S-F

Dear Bill Hamling:

I've never written to you before, and I probably never will again. But your answer to Dale Spady's letter in the February issue prompted me to send you this letter in apology for the lack of respect in which I and Fandom held your magazine.

This change of opinion on my part didn't come out of the blue, rather, it is a reversal forced on me by intelligently evaluating your place in science fiction.

Although I can't say that I like the type of story you print, it has a very definite and respectable place in s-f. A no less important or appreciable place than any other variety of science fiction writing. IMAGINATION and its companion magazine, IMAGINATIVE TALES are primarily directed toward the newer fans, the younger ones, and in this capacity are more truly at the pulse-beat of s-f than any of the other magazines.

We should not heap criticism on the "juvenile" magazines for being what they are. Although *Madge* and *Tales* do *now* seem too juvenile and boringly repetitious, the important thing to remember is that they didn't seem that way when *we* first started out as s-f readers. Rather they were a ticket to the exciting realms of the imagination. And, I would like to point out, the stories are, in essence, the same now as then. They are tremendously exciting to the newcomer, but not to the more or less jaded minds of the older fans. Your magazines should not be held in contempt for this. Rather they should be congratulated for doing a fine job in planting the seeds of s-f in the minds of future grownup fans of America.

So accept my apology for my previous short-sightedness, and I hope Fandom will recognize its mistake and credit your magazines as leaders rather than second-rate followers of the so-called big three. Truly, you're the "Big 1."

Ronald Paul Musser
704 N. James St.
Carbondale, Ill.

All donations kindly accepted ....wlh

TOP OF HIS LIST

Dear Bill Hamling:

THE COSMIC LOOTERS was one of the best stories I've ever read. Only one to top it was BRING BACK MY BRAIN! (April '57 issue). Matter of fact I'll put LOOTERS on the Top of my list. Let's have more stories of equal quality!

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

Coming right up, sir! . . . which closes shop for this month .....wlh

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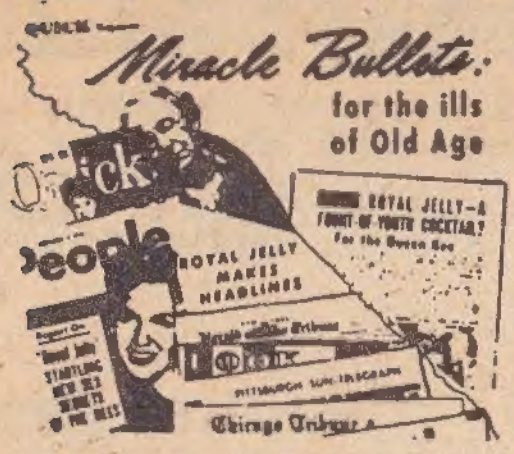

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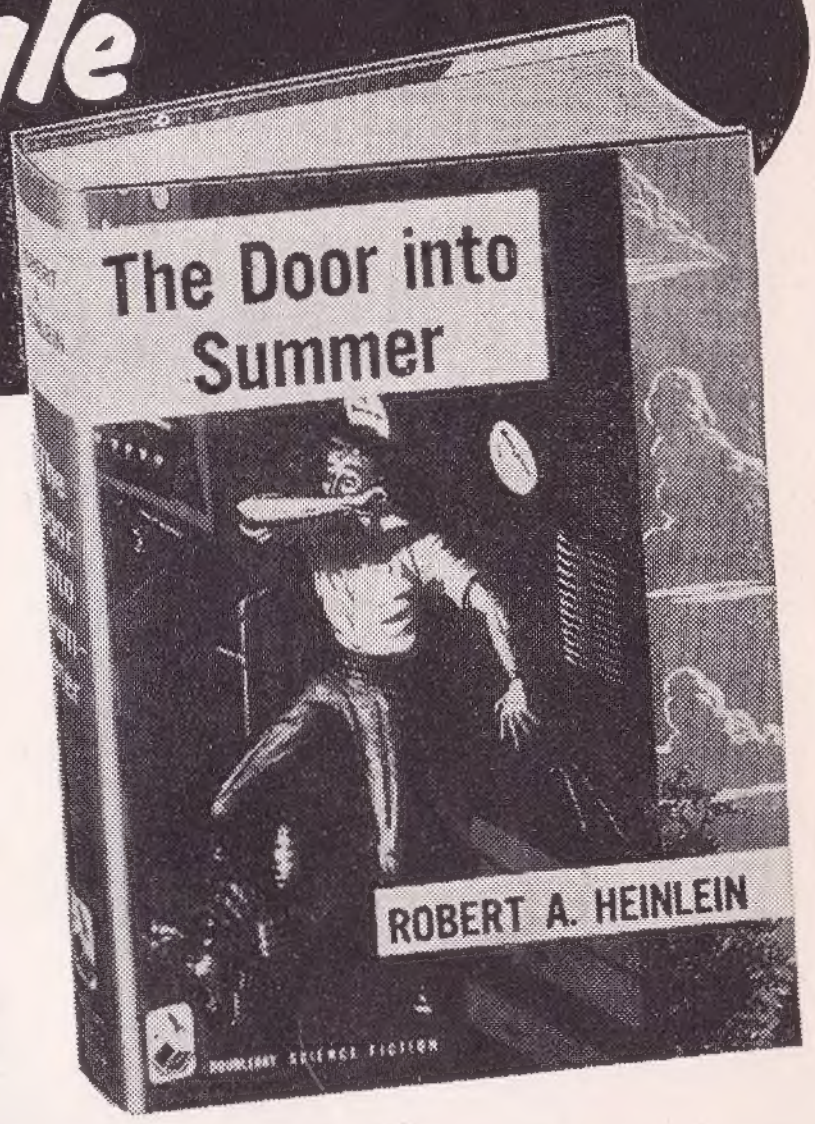

—*Continued from Back Cover*

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You wake up *30 YEARS LATER*, in the year 2000—and you're still only 29 years old! But time has passed while you were in "cold storage," and Belle, your *ex*-sweetheart, is now 30 years older than you are! Well, you've lost interest in her anyway, after the way she two-timed and future-timed you.

The Fascinating World of 2000 A.D.

But there are other attractions in that world of 2000: its women in "sticktite" clothes they just throw away after wearing...its honeymoon trips to the moon... its remarkable new conveniences ...its brand new words of love and ways to live. No more menial labor. Robots take care of all that. Soon you're enjoying life as never before! You're glad to be out of that miserably backward world of the 20th century.

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—Continued on other side

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